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# THE NAVAL MEMOIRS OF ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET SIR ROGER KEYES

Scapa Flow to the Dover

Straits

1916—1918

THE second and last volume of these deeply interesting memoirs opens after the evacuation of Gallipoli. There would have been no evacuation could the Admiral have had his own way. On being ordered to London to give evidence before the Dardanelles Commission, he did so with no uncertain voice.

While in the Grand Fleet he made a deep study of the much misunderstood Battle of Jutland, a vivid account of which is embodied in the book. The great work recorded in this volume, however, was carried out when, having been appointed to the command of the Dover Patrol, he helped to defeat the submarine menace which was threatening the very life of the country by closing the Straits of Dover to the passage of enemy submarines. Sir Roger Keyes led the attack on Zeebrugge which made memorable St. George's Day, 1918, and in the autumn of that year commanded the naval forces in the great offensive which resulted in the final evacuation of Bruges and the Flanders coast. In November he rode into Brussels when the King and Queen of the Belgians triumphantly entered their liberated capital.

Such were the magnificent achievements of which this volume tells the moving tale.



NAVAL MEMOIRS,  
1916-1918

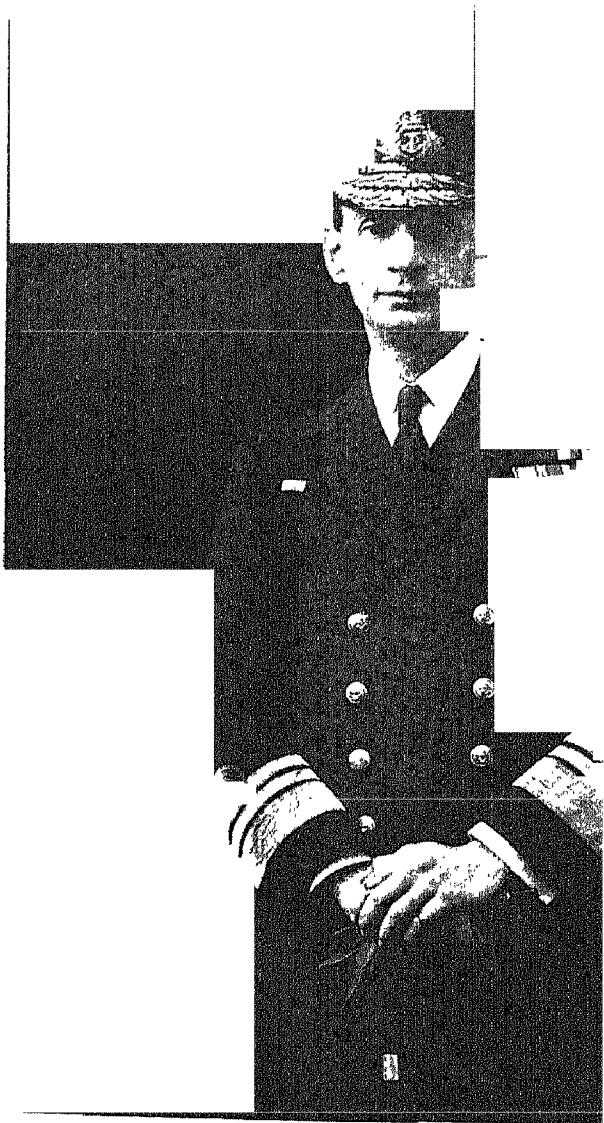


*By the same Author*

THE NAVAL MEMOIRS:

THE NARROW SEAS TO THE DARDANELLES  
1910-1915





VICE-ADMIRAL SIR ROGER KEYES  
1918

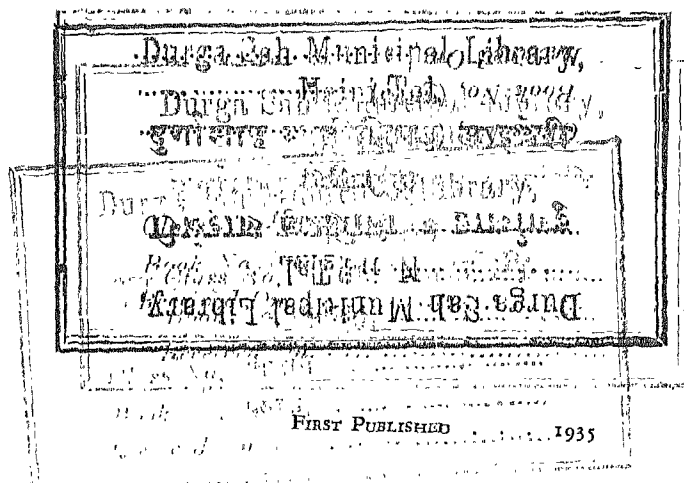
THE NAVAL MEMOIRS  
*of*  
ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET  
SIR ROGER KEYES

*Scapa Flow to the Dover Straits*

1916—1918



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TO  
ALL WHO SAILED WITH ME



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## FOREWORD

WHEN I commenced my Naval Memoirs, and wrote the foreword to the first volume on 11th November, 1933, I was very unhappy about the state of the Navy and the naval situation generally. I had so ardently hoped to be allowed to take a hand in restoring the Navy to the condition in which Lord Beatty had left it in 1927; but Fate had decided otherwise, and I often wondered how I could now best help the Service in which I had spent my life, to regain trust in its Administration and faith in its future.

I had no thought of going into Parliament. However, on 1st January, 1934, I received a telephone message, begging me to stand for North Portsmouth. I rejected the suggestion without any hesitation, saying that I could not afford the expense, I had not the gift of speech, and lacking that essential, would have little chance of doing any good. My friends returned to the charge, however, and it occurred to me, that perhaps after all I might be able to be of some service, and so I consented, regarding it as a call to battle. I hoped to wake the country up to the dangers of the naval situation; and be of some service to the Navy in its adversity, by fighting its battles in the House of Commons, and by striving to free it from the toils of the London Treaty and the dual control of its Air Service, which had had such a disastrous effect on its efficiency.

When I left the Admiralty in June, 1925, to take command of the Mediterranean Station, a Cabinet Committee—presided over by Lord Birkenhead—had been for some time considering the future strength of our cruiser fleet; eventually Lord Beatty succeeded in proving to the Government that 70 cruisers—which we considered the *minimum* number (we had 140 at the commencement of the War)—*must* be maintained, if the Admiralty were to continue to be responsible for the sea communications and the naval defence of the Empire.

The replacement of our obsolete cruisers then proceeded, much too slowly, it is true, but nevertheless unrestricted by external ties and Treaties—until 1929, when the Socialist Government came into office for the second time.

It is to the credit of the first Socialist Government that, with the support of the Conservative Opposition, and to the indignation of their Liberal allies, they were responsible for laying down five cruisers, a greatly overdue replacement, and the first vessels we built in any way comparable with the cruisers, which all the other Naval Powers had been building for some time. But the Socialists then had the guidance of Lord Haldane, who to all intents and purposes was their Minister of Defence.

Unfortunately Lord Haldane had passed, and bent on further disarmament, the Prime Minister invited the four other Naval Powers, who were parties to the Treaty of Washington, to attend another Naval Conference in London; and the Government, with the acquiescence of their new naval advisers, then proceeded to wreck the British Navy in the interests of Peace!

The London Treaty, which was the outcome of their deplorable effort, not only forced us to scrap five more of our few remaining powerful ships—which were still good for many years of valuable service—but it limited us to 50 cruisers and an utterly inadequate number of destroyers; and it also crippled our freedom to build the kind of ships we wanted, and even restricted the replacement of our old war-worn vessels; with the result that when the Treaty terminates next year, 14 of our 50 cruisers, and 40 of our destroyers, will be over age and due for scrapping.

It was obvious that the Socialist Party, who had let us in for this suicidal policy, could not be trusted with the defence of the Empire. Their London Treaty had, with the stroke of a pen, destroyed all the safeguards, so vital for the protection of our trade routes, which we had insisted upon and which had been embodied in the Washington Treaty. Moreover, France and Italy—the two European nations who were parties to the Washington Treaty—were left free to build such cruisers, destroyers, and submarines as they thought fit, unrestricted by the limitations imposed upon us; since they declined to jeopardise their security, and would have nothing to do with this outrageous Treaty.

During my election campaign, I stressed the point that

without adequate defence forces, there was no safeguard for the communications of our Empire. It was pure folly to imagine, that by disarming ourselves in a rapidly arming world, we were going to contribute anything towards the preservation of peace.

The National Government had done great things for the welfare of the people, the recovery of our trade and the restoration of the financial stability and credit of the country, which two years of Socialist Government had reduced to the verge of bankruptcy; and I pledged myself to support the National Government in everything they did for the unity and defence of the Empire, but held myself free to oppose them in anything which in my opinion fell short of this, and I made it clear that I profoundly distrusted their Indian policy. I attacked the London Treaty every time I spoke, and in fact, fought my election from beginning to end on the necessity for adequate defence.

I was duly elected on the 19th February, 1934, the anniversary of my engagement to my wife, which I considered a happy omen, for she has been an invaluable ally and helpmate, and a good companion through fair weather and foul, in peace-time and war.

Soon after I took my seat in the House of Commons, the Naval Estimates came up for discussion, and in the course of my maiden speech I hotly attacked the London Treaty, and during a discussion on armaments three months later (July, 1934), I reminded the House of the Naval Defence Act of 1889—the last time our naval security was in jeopardy—and suggested that the Government should launch a Defence Loan to make up for past deficiencies, as they were faced with a vast expenditure on naval replacements and air expansion, which could not be provided out of revenue without greatly increasing taxation. That autumn I went to Canada and America and talked of it there, and Canadians and even Americans said that they would subscribe to such an excellent investment, as a strong British Navy was the best guarantee for the peace of the world.

In my last chapter, I have related our efforts to avert the fate to which the Royal Naval Air Service was doomed by the Government's unfortunate decision to absorb it in the Royal Air Force.



The protagonists of what they call a Unified Air Service, claim that the air is one, whether it lies over the sea or the land ; they say that you cannot have a dividing line—quite regardless of the fundamental fact, that aircraft are entirely dependent upon their parent ships or their land bases, and that the security of these depends upon the Navy, the Army, or both.

All fighting to obtain command of the sea *must* be the business of the Navy, whether it is carried out by surface ships, submarines or aircraft ; and divided authority in war must inevitably lead to confusion, inefficiency and disaster.

The safeguards on which we had counted, to enable the Admiralty to develop the Navy's air needs, having proved futile, the Navy must be freed from outside interference and be allowed to spread its wings once again.

In their "White Paper on Defence" of 1st March, 1935, the Government somewhat tardily reminded the country that "If peace should be broken, the Navy is, as always, the first line of defence for the maintenance of our essential sea communications." One thing is absolutely certain, the vast majority of the people of these islands are far more likely to suffer from the lack of sea-borne essentials, which make life possible, such as food, raw materials, fuel and lubricating oil, etc., than from poison gas or bombs, if the enemy has ships capable of cutting the sea communications, on which the very life of Great Britain depends.

History has shown over and over again, with unfailing regularity, the humiliations and defeats we suffered, when our armed forces and maritime powers were allowed to decline and decay, because the political horizon was for the moment clear.

I believe that the country is at last waking up to the dangers into which it has drifted, through allowing its naval defences to decline, in the vain hope that this would make for peace.

Who can doubt that, if we had the strong Navy we possessed 21 years ago, there would be much less anxiety now amongst the nations in Europe, and far less danger of war in the immediate future.

ROGER KEYES.

*Tingewick House,  
4th August, 1935.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WOULD like to place on record how deeply I am indebted to my wife for the invaluable help she has given me in writing these Memoirs—apart from the fact that she typed every word of them.

I am grateful to Lieut.-Commander John Pollen, R.N., for the trouble he has taken to produce the plans which illustrate this volume. He was responsible for the plans in the two official works: "Naval Operations," and "The Narrative of the Battle of Jutland." Since they were published, additional German information has become available, which Lieut.-Commander Pollen has embodied in these plans.

I have also to thank Commander J. H. Owen for having carefully indexed this Volume and for having helped to correct the proofs.

I share with the Navy a debt of gratitude to the Rev. J. L. Pastfield who has conclusively vindicated the gunnery of our battle cruisers and the efficiency of our armour and projectiles in his book "New Light on Jutland," in which he has made a careful analysis of every hit recorded on both British and German ships.

Our Armament Firms and Naval Constructors were not responsible for the lightness of the armour, nor the lack of subdivision in our ships; and in the light of the evidence the Rev. Pastfield has produced, it can no longer be doubted that our highly inflammable and explosive cordite, combined with the inadequate protection of our turrets, was solely responsible for the loss of our ships and some thousands of lives in the Battle of Jutland. Incidentally, the instability of our cordite was responsible for the loss of the *Bulwark*, *Natal*, *Vanguard* and *Glatton*.

R.K.



# NAVAL MEMOIRS, 1916-1918

## CHAPTER I

### EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Re-organisation of sea communications ; Salonika, Visits to British and French Fronts ; Visits to Mitylene and Gulf of Smyrna ; Partridge drive on Long Island ; Enemy submarines inflict heavy loss ; Allied Conference at Malta ; Re-allocation of zones ; Loss of *M30* ; Loss of *Russell* ; News of Battle of Jutland ; Ordered home at once.

AFTER the evacuation of Gallipoli, in January, 1916, I longed to get back to the North Sea in time to take part in the great battle, which we felt could not be long delayed, and away from an area so full of unhappy memories and mortifying disappointments.

But the sea communications of the Salonika Army and its southern flank had to be secured, there was much re-organisation to be carried out, and I did not like to ask the Admiral to release me until the Fleet had settled down under the new conditions.

Salonika had become of immense importance ; ashore things went pretty smoothly, thanks to the tact, good nature and loyalty of Sir Bryan Mahon, but afloat the situation was not too easy. The new French Admiral—Gauchet—evidently thought that, as the Allied Army was under General Sarrail, and the Dardanelles Campaign at an end, he ought to command the naval forces in that area ; despite the fact that we had provided the very extensive anti-submarine defences of Salonika, and nine-tenths of the vessels which patrolled the routes through the Eastern Mediterranean. He was by no means cordial to de Robeck and at no pains to hide his resentment at de Robeck's presence at Salonika, where, by virtue of his acting rank of Vice-Admiral, he assumed command. Our relations with his predecessor had been so pleasant and the loyalty and devotion to de Robeck so genuine, that it was a nasty shock to find a completely different atmosphere when we went to Salonika shortly after the evacuation. However, many of our French

friends of the previous régime were still there, and thanks to their friendship and the good offices of Millot, and the exercise of a good deal of tact, matters went without unpleasant incidents.

General Birdwood accompanied us to Salonika for a few days as the Admiral's guest, and was given a wonderful send-off when he left for Egypt, the band playing "Auld Lang Syne" and "Wull ye no come back again" which must have touched him. His departure broke the last link with that wonderful army, which, deprived of the victory which was its due, was to win glorious laurels in France, Flanders and other fronts.

I took an early opportunity of visiting the defences of Salonika, in company with Brigadier-General Howell, Sir Bryan Mahon's Chief of Staff, and Ramsay. We motored out over the pass, which was defended by two naval six-inch guns and then clambered about the hillside examining the trenches and gun positions which were being constructed, everyone was digging hard and making an apparently impregnable position. We met all sorts—Scots Fusiliers, Highlanders of a "K" division, regular regiments of the 27th and 28th Divisions. One battalion of 2nd Royal Fusiliers impressed us immensely, the Colonel—who had lost one eye and wore an eyeglass in the other—told us that his regiment had already lost 203 officers and 3,000 odd men in France, and that he had been in the trenches 17 months. His trenches were in beautiful order, wonderfully drained, and his machine-gun positions were concealed with extraordinary skill. He had ploughed a bogus field in front of one part of his line, and planted a vineyard in another place, and was a most entertaining, happy warrior. We only heard one fear expressed repeatedly throughout the day—the position was so strong that the Bulgars and Germans might never attack it; as to the result if they did, no one had the slightest doubt.

We met one "K" battalion of Welsh miners making wonderful trenches in awful ground, most of which had to be blasted—a sergeant remarked to us that it was nothing to his lads. We then rode as far as the French line, and watched our pioneer regiments making roads. We were much impressed with the physique and cheerful spirit of our splendid army; the atmosphere at Salonika itself was very different, and painfully reminiscent of that at Mudros, with every kind of intrigue and wickedness added.

That was the first of many pleasant expeditions along the front, generally in company with Admiral de Robeck, who was a delightful companion and always charming to me, in spite of our past disagreements.

Two expeditions stand out in my memory. We landed early one cold misty morning and motored up to a Divisional Headquarters in the hills above Salonika. A massed band, composed of men wearing a dozen different regimental badges, was playing when we arrived. As a compliment to the Admiral, or perhaps by chance, the band struck up selections from Sullivan's *Pinafore*. Then the General, an A.D.C. and a Staff Officer, the Admiral, Bowlby and I mounted and rode down one of the new roads to the plains below, and thence at a steady "riding-school canter" 40 miles to Stavros, only twice drawing rein for a few moments to change horses. At Stavros we embarked in the *Triad*, and after nightfall we returned to Salonika, some 150 miles by sea.

Our right flank was held by two brigades of the 27th Regular Division, with their left resting on Lake Beshik—which is 15 miles in length and was patrolled by motor boats manned by naval officers and ratings—and with their right on the sea at Stavros. Here a small naval force was anchored, consisting of the "blistered" cruiser *Endymion* and two small monitors. We had not sufficient anti-submarine net to protect the anchorage, so laid a line of buoys outside the ships to represent net buoys, as a warning to enemy submarines to avoid the place, which they did, though there was nothing to prevent them from coming in or firing through the imaginary net. Of course, the Admiral did not risk the *Lord Nelson* in this exposed position, but we often visited Stavros in the *Triad*, and watched a very strong defensive position develop. This included four naval guns, which, after they and their magazines had been installed by naval working parties, were handed over to the Army.

At that time the place was full of game and the lakes of fish, and service there was very popular.

Another day General Sarraill invited the Admiral and me to accompany him along the French Front. It was very interesting to see the French Army at work. We stopped for lunch at one of the little fortresses, a chain of which the French were constructing along their front. The troops were having their

midday meal and a band was playing. The General called out a private who had played a beautiful solo on the flute, and found he had won first prize for the year at the *Conservatoire* in Paris. The General told us that many distinguished musicians were serving in the ranks. Then for our entertainment he had all the trumpeters and drummers in the neighbourhood mustered, and told them to sound a charge. I have never listened to anything more inspiring. First there was a note like a hound's whimper here and then another there, and then, like a pack of hounds breaking out of covert in full cry, all the trumpets picked up the note and blared out a call which would have woken the dead. The young officer who had been directed by the General to arrange this display, rushed up when it was over with his eyes ablaze, and saluting Sarraïl, said something to the effect that no one could resist such a call. Judging by the effect that it had on me, I can well believe it.

After the evacuation of the Gallipoli Army, the Admiral was more free to visit other parts of the Station, which had hitherto been rather out of reach, and one of our first expeditions was to Port Iero in the Island of Mitylene, a landlocked harbour which acted as a base for destroyers, monitors and motor gunboats blockading Smyrna.

On that occasion the Senior Officer-in-Charge was Captain Grant of the *Canopus*,\* whose ship had gone farther up the Dardanelles than any other battleship, when she covered the attack on the minefields on the 11th March.†

The French had an aerodrome a few miles away from the harbour, and their aircraft co-operated most excellently with our vessels. The Admiral, Grant and I walked out to see the pilots, and found a gay and gallant company of lads, who were obviously delighted at the Admiral's visit and his warm appreciation of their work.

The inshore blockade of Smyrna was maintained by five motor gunboats under Commander Morton Smart, R.N.V.R.,‡ from an advanced base at the south-west end of the Island of Chustan, commonly known as Long Island, in the Gulf of Smyrna.

\* See Vol. I, pages 211 and 212.

† Her namesake was the flagship of Admiral Louis and had had the honour of leading Admiral Duckworth's Fleet both up and down, when he forced the passage of the Straits in 1807. See Vol. I, pages 175 to 177.

‡ Now Sir Morton Smart, M.D.

Three of these vessels were built in England for Turkey and were acquired for the Navy when war broke out. They each carried two three-pounder guns and a couple of maxims and were manned by two officers and six men.

Before the War, Commander Morton Smart was making a name for himself as a doctor, and in his spare time he was Commodore of the British Motor Boat Club. He had cured de Robeck of sciatica, and through the latter I had made friends with him, and had helped to interest Mr. Churchill in Smart's scheme to form a motor boat reserve manned by yachtsmen, to act as Fleet Auxiliaries and to hunt submarines. A committee was formed at the Admiralty to go into the matter, but war broke out before anything was settled, and Morton Smart joined up at once as a Naval Surgeon.

Churchill, however, had not forgotten his scheme, and cancelling his professional appointment, he gave him the rank of Commander R.N.V.R. in charge of a motor gunboat patrol, engaged in co-operation with the Army in the canals of France and Belgium. Finding that his vessels were of little value there, Smart wrote and begged de Robeck to apply for his command for service in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Admiral did so, with the result that the transfer was approved and Morton Smart brought his small vessel through the canal system to Marseilles and thence to Mudros, where the other gunboats, sent out by freight, joined him.

In September, 1915, they were sent to the Gulf of Smyrna, and on Smart's recommendation, the Admiral decided to occupy Long Island, which covered the approaches to Smyrna and Vourla, and had several good anchorages affording shelter in any weather.

The island was normally populated by about 300 Greeks, who cultivated the land, but they had been evacuated when hostilities against Smyrna commenced, as the island was commanded by the guns of the mainland. However, a number of men had been repatriated, and worked under Smart's orders as guards and look-outs.

From Mitylene we went in the destroyer *Ribble* to Long Island, as the Admiral was anxious to inspect this advanced base, in order to decide whether it should be retained, in view of the increasing activity of the enemy, who freed of our presence in



Gallipoli, were mounting new batteries to interfere with the blockading vessels.

On our arrival off Long Island we were met by Morton Smart in his motor gunboat the *Mary Rose*, and he suggested that we should have a partridge drive, before inspecting the various establishments on the island. In anticipation of this, he had engaged all the available Greeks to drive the birds from the south to the north of the island, and they reported a great many red legs and four woodcock. Smart placed the guns and the birds came over well, but the shooting was very poor. While we were waiting for the next drive to start—according to Smart—I spoilt the drive by showing myself over the skyline which we had been warned not to do, with the result that before it ended, three six-inch shells from a Turkish battery on the mainland fell close to the line of guns. We sat tight but the beaters fled, and it was a long time before they could be collected for the third drive. The total bag was only 12 brace of partridges, it should have been three or four times as many.

After that we embarked in the *Mary Rose* and stood down to the south end of the island, to inspect the motor gunboat's base in the village of Nikola; while on our way there, a Turkish aeroplane came over from Smyrna and attacked the *Mary Rose*, but the bombs fell very wide and after four attempts it flew back, having evidently exhausted its ammunition.

It came on to blow very hard while we were at the south end of the island, and we had a very rough and uncomfortable passage back to the *Ribble*. Morton Smart told us at one time that we were passing through one of the minefields which the French had laid in September, 1915. He assured the Admiral that he and his Navigator knew the passage through very well, but as it was pitch dark and impossible to see any marks, we could only hope for the best. However, we got safely back to Port Iero, after an amusing and interesting day.

With a view to retaining as many enemy troops as possible in the neighbourhood of Smyrna, the Admiral ordered the monitors *Raglan* and *Roberts*, each armed with two 14-inch guns, and four "M" class monitors to attack the outer defences of Smyrna and the military buildings in the vicinity and at Vourla. Later we gathered from our Secret Service agents that a good deal of damage had been inflicted, and that a considerable army

under the command of Liman von Sanders had concentrated there.

By an arrangement made with France and Italy in June, 1915, the British zone under Admiral de Robeck's command was bounded by Euboea and the chain of islands stretching south-east to Mykonos, thence through Nikaria and Samos to the Turkish mainland. All the rest of the Mediterranean, except British and Italian territorial waters, was under the French Commander-in-Chief, who was responsible for the safety of our transport, except in the vicinity of Gibraltar, Malta and the Egyptian coast.

Throughout the Gallipoli Campaign the military authorities had insisted, that all transports and supply ships should proceed in the first instance to Alexandria, thus adding several hundred miles to the distance they had to travel. Except for the delay it entailed, this was not of vital importance until German submarines arrived in the Mediterranean, when of course it added considerably to naval anxieties and responsibilities. When this procedure was continued for the supply and reinforcement of the Salonika Army, after enemy submarines had become a real menace, it became almost intolerable. Admiral de Robeck warmly protested without avail, the Commander-in-Chief in Egypt continued rigidly to administer the Salonika Army, much to the annoyance of its Staff for military reasons, and to our disgust, for ships were subjected to additional risks which they should have been spared. By the end of February the Allies had lost 100 ships, of which 55 were British, and we know now that there were five large submarines operating in the Mediterranean, which had come out from Germany, as well as a number of small vessels sent out by rail in sections and put together at Pola. Two or three of these submarines were most boldly and skilfully handled, and were taking heavy toll of our ships by gun and torpedo, in areas outside our control. It was clear that a thorough re-organisation of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean was essential, to meet the submarine threat, and other contingencies which were causing deep concern to the Allied Governments.

The Admirals were ordered to confer at Malta, and at the end of February we arrived there in the *Lord Nelson* to attend a conference, which opened on the following day under the Presidency

of Admiral Dartige du Fournet, the French Commander-in-Chief. At that time the Duke of Abruzzi was Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Fleet, and he was represented by Admiral Pini; Rear-Admirals Gauchet and Moreau, commanding the two detached French squadrons; and Vice-Admiral Limpus (Admiral Superintendant of Malta Dockyard, who was senior to de Robeck) was the senior British officer present. Admiral Wemyss—now Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies—who had four battleships and a number of patrol craft based in Egyptian waters, was represented by Commander Marriott.

Admiral de Robeck went armed with a memorandum which we had prepared, covering all the points which were to come up for discussion. Our main object, of course, was to safeguard the transport routes to Salonika and Egypt against submarine attack, and make the best use of the limited resources that we had at our disposal. With this in view, the Admiral suggested the re-allocation of certain zones, and offered to be responsible for a considerably increased area.

After reading the instructions which had been issued by the three Admiralties, the Commander-in-Chief paid my Admiral the compliment of saying that he proposed to adopt, as a basis for discussion, the written proposals of Admiral de Robeck. This rather irked Admiral Gauchet, who was anxious to retain as much as possible of the *Ægean*, but thanks to the tact of Admiral Dartige and the good friendship of Admiral Moreau, all difficulties were smoothed over.

Admiral de Robeck had directed me to prepare a memorandum giving our views as to the best way to deal with the submarine menace. The most extraordinary misconceptions existed, not only as to the potentialities of submarines but also as to their limitations. For instance, a vast system of espionage existed to detect the enemy's bases, and their sources of supply of provisions and petrol, on which they were supposed to be dependent for their ability to operate. The Allied agents were often thoroughly humbugged by informers, and a great deal of money was wasted on fruitless espionage, and time on futile search.\*

Much of the information contained in our anti-submarine

\* The Turks seem to have been equally ill-informed, and we learnt after the War, that a number of Greeks were punished by them for supplying our submarines in the Marmora, while they, of course, were quite independent of outside help.

memorandum, which was given to the Conference, has been mentioned already in earlier chapters, and I will only mention one statement—apropos of a French proposal to lay nets and mines against submarines—to the effect that physical measures were of little value unless they were under the constant observation of patrol craft; and we recommended that minefields should be laid at such a depth that our patrol craft could operate safely above them; a form of attack which was effectively developed two years later in home waters, after the unwatched nets and minefields had proved their futility.

The Conference declared that our first object was to prevent enemy submarines coming into the Mediterranean, but recognised that a great many more vessels would be required, before the anti-submarine patrols and net barrages in the Straits of Gibraltar and Otranto could be made effective.

Admiral de Robeck's proposals were generally accepted, and the British took over the responsibility for the Ægean and the routes from Malta and Salonika to Egypt. Large transports carrying troops had been convoyed by one or two destroyers, and the question of extending the convoy system was considered, but the number of vessels suitable for convoy work at that time was quite inadequate, so it was arranged to allocate as many armed craft as possible to patrol the routes, with the object of preventing submarines from remaining on the surface in the vicinity, thus limiting their vision to their periscopes and their weapons to torpedoes, and denying them the use of their guns, with which they had been doing great execution. Arrangements were also made to route vessels, diverting them from areas in which submarines were known to be working.

The Conference had orders to consider the possibility of :

- (1) The *Goeben* and *Breslau* breaking out of the Dardanelles in order to proceed to the Adriatic.
- (2) The Austrian Fleet breaking out of the Adriatic to attack Salonika or make for the Dardanelles.
- (3) However improbable it might seem, to consider the possibility of the entry of a German Fleet into the Mediterranean.

It was evident that the French Fleet based on Malta and Biserta could not possibly gain contact with an Italian Fleet

based on Taranto and Brindisi, or affect the passage of an Austrian Fleet to the eastward. It was essential therefore that a considerable portion of the French Fleet should be based nearer the Straits of Otranto. Corfu and Argostoli were considered and eventually it was decided to recommend the occupation of Argostoli; Admiral de Robeck undertook to provide the necessary anti-submarine net to protect it, and to connect Argostoli by telegraph cable with the other fleet bases.

It was decided to leave to Admiral de Robeck the disposition of the forces in the Ægean, to meet the three contingencies laid down. Admiral Gauchet demurred, as he was obsessed with the idea that the vessels at Salonika must be at the disposal of the French Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Army—"to prevent all seditious movements in the town." At that time there were over 200,000 troops within reach of the town, and it seemed to us out of the question, that the freedom of the Fleet to deal with the naval situation should be governed by any such consideration. This question came to a head during Admiral de Robeck's absence—owing to a fall at polo the previous day—and I was able, on his behalf, to insist that the senior naval officer on the spot should be given a free hand. At the same time I gave an assurance that he would, of course, consult the French Admiral and General before withdrawing the French ships from Salonika.

To sum up, it was finally agreed that the plan of action to meet the emergence of the *Goeben* and *Breslau* from the Dardanelles and the Austrian Fleet from the Adriatic should be :

- (1) Concentration of the Italian Fleet at Brindisi and Valona—this included a British and a French squadron, the attachment of which was insisted upon when Italy came into the War.

- (2) Concentration of the French Fleet at Argostoli.

- (3) Concentration of Admiral de Robeck's forces at Mudros, after leaving at Salonika the number of vessels necessary for the defence of that place.

With reference to the possibility of a German Fleet entering the Mediterranean, it was decided that if this should occur, its junction with the Austrian Fleet must be prevented at all costs,

and that after leaving sufficient ships to guard Salonika, Admiral de Robeck should proceed to Malta with all his forces, to which would be added Admiral Wemyss' four battleships from Egypt. Various other questions were dealt with, such as the International control of wireless, telegraph cables, and espionage and counter-espionage. The employment of Greek volunteers for raids on the Turkish coast, in which my Admiral was greatly interested, was also considered, and after ten days we parted company the best of friends, having improved the Allied co-operation in the Mediterranean very considerably.

Those ten days at Malta were a delightful change after our strenuous year in the Eastern Mediterranean. Malta had naturally been very depressed and distressed by the presence of thousands of wounded from Gallipoli, but these had now left for England and Egypt, and the Admiral thought it quite time to cheer the place up a bit. So it was given out that we were in need of amusement and recreation, and we managed to put in a good deal of both between the daily conferences.

The Admiral installed himself in Admiralty House, while the *Lord Nelson* was in dock, and entertained most liberally, as he always did. Old "Black Saliba"—the horse dealer—had innumerable polo ponies, left on his hands by soldiers and sailors who had hurriedly left the island when war broke out, so we played polo every evening after the conference, as well as the morning of the day we sailed. The Admiral was very severely bruised and shaken by the fall I have mentioned, but he insisted on the dinner and dance we had arranged for that night going on, and deputed me to act as host, while he held a regular levee in his bedroom.

Owing to his accident, he was unable to attend a ceremony on board the *France*—the French flagship—which the Commander-in-Chief had arranged for the presentation of the Legion of Honour, which the French Government had conferred on several French officers, Admiral de Robeck and myself; so I was the sole British representative, and received the accolade on the quarter-deck, after a large luncheon party attended by the Governor, Admiral Limpus and a number of ladies. It was a great ceremony, Admiral Dartige touched me on both shoulders with his sword and embraced me on both cheeks. After a fanfare of trumpets all the other holders of the Legion of Honour,

who had been standing behind me with drawn swords, came forward, shook hands and congratulated me. I was told by some of the English spectators, that I responded to the Admiral's embrace with a kissing noise, if I did so I was quite unconscious of it, but I was immensely touched by the warm good comradeship of my French friends. In awarding me this decoration, the Minister of Marine sent me a message to say that it was given to me as: "Une distinction qui est le témoignage du concours précieux que vous avez apporté à l'œuvre commune."

Shortly after we returned to the *Ægean*, the French Commander-in-Chief telegraphed, that he had heard from the Minister of Marine in Paris, that information from a reliable source indicated that the Austrian Fleet was preparing to come out of the Adriatic; other information indicated exceptional activity in the Dardanelles, especially in regard to lifting of mines, which lent colour to a belief that the Austrian Fleet would go that way. He went on to say that he was communicating with the Italian Commander-in-Chief and also with his Ministry of Marine in Paris, to ask if the political situation permitted the French Fleet to establish itself at Argostoli.

Whereupon Admiral de Robeck telegraphed to the Admiralty, pointing out that no reliance could be placed on the Italian Fleet preventing the Austrian Fleet breaking out of the Adriatic. In their present position they would always be at least six hours behind, and it was highly improbable that news of the Austrian Fleet's exit would be received before it was through the Straits of Otranto. In these circumstances he urged the immediate importance of establishing the French Fleet at Argostoli, and that political considerations should not be allowed to weigh unduly over matters of urgent military necessity.

Admiral Dartige was informed by the French Government, that the political situation did not admit of a concentration at Argostoli, moreover, a great obstacle was a lack of anti-submarine nets to protect the southern entrance. Admiral de Robeck at once placed all our nets and net layers at Admiral Dartige's disposal, and sent a further hastener to the Admiralty. They acted promptly, and our Government made strong representations in Paris, and at the same time recommended laying mines off the Dardanelles and sending a submarine into the Marmora. This latter, to my relief, the Admiral declined to do. During

the Gallipoli Campaign any risks were justified, but none as a counter-measure to such a very problematical and, to my mind, utterly unlikely proceeding on the part of the Austrian Fleet. The Admiral however ordered 500 mines from Malta and told the Admiralty he would lay 300 (the capacity of our minelayer) the night he heard of the Austrian Fleet being at sea.

On 21st March, the three Admiralties approved of the Malta Conference's recommendations, and the Commander-in-Chief was authorised by the French Government to protect Argostoli against submarine attack, in readiness for the arrival of the French Fleet.

As a defended base in Crete would be essential to the proper control of the Malta-Egypt route, which had been confided to Admiral de Robeck, he asked the Admiralty to make arrangements with the Greek Government for the occupation of Suda Bay. Similarly a defended anchorage at Port Laki in the Island of Leros on the Salonika-Egypt route would be of great value, and he suggested that the Italian Government might be asked to permit us to net the entrance.

Meanwhile the British and French Ministers at Athens experienced a very rough time, when they were instructed to inform the Greek Government of a *fait accompli* at Argostoli. They were told by the Prime Minister that we went from one act of violence to another, he would next hear of our placing nets to protect Suda Bay—which in fact we were actually doing at the moment! The Greeks were certainly in a very difficult position and one can hardly wonder at their anxiety, with the threat of a German-Austrian-Bulgarian army within striking distance of their frontiers, and a Franco-British Fleet in command of the waters surrounding their coasts, through which their necessities of life had to pass. A bargaining weapon which our Governments were at last making use of.

As I have mentioned in a previous chapter, the Admiral was a great believer in decentralisation. The re-organisation of the Eastern Mediterranean gave opportunities for extending the system, and when de Robeck went home three months later, we were told that his successor and mine chaffingly referred to their inheritance as a state of petty Rajahs. However, I don't think they altered things much.



In April the Admiral paid another visit to the Smyrna patrol. By this time the enemy had so increased their defences in the Gulf of Smyrna, as to make our advanced base in the village of Nikola untenable, and fuel and stores had been removed to the other end of the island. Several unsuccessful attempts were made by the monitors to destroy the batteries, which were well sited and almost impossible to reach with the monitors' flat trajectory guns. In the course of these operations the monitor *M30* was hit one night by a six-inch shell in the engine-room, which set her oil fuel on fire, she at once became a target for all the guns within reach and was soon drifting helplessly ablaze. Fortunately Morton Smart was at hand in the motor gunboat *California*, which he gallantly laid alongside the burning wreck and took off the survivors. *M30* was then drifting towards the Turkish shore; fearing that she would ground and become a prize, or sink in deep water, Smart lashed the *California* alongside her and towed her into shallow water off Long Island, where she sank. During the whole of this operation the Turks kept up a heavy fire which caused some casualties, including Smart, who was wounded.

*M30*'s guns and all her projectiles were salvaged in the course of the next ten days, by the most devoted perseverance of Captain Carver, R.N., and a small party, who dug themselves into the cliff opposite the wreck and worked day and night constantly under fire, until everything had been taken out of her.\* When this work was completed, Long Island was evacuated, and the inshore blockade was abandoned.

On 27th April we heard of the loss of the *Russell* (flying the flag of Rear-Admiral S. Fremantle) which was proceeding to Malta to refit. She ran into a small minefield laid by a German submarine in 80 fathoms, only about two miles from Malta. The *Russell* capsized and sank in about 25 minutes. The Admiral and most of the officers and ship's company were picked up swimming; 20 officers and 79 men losing their lives. Of the survivors, seven officers and 12 men, who landed apparently none the worse, died within the next two days from nitrogen poisoning, attributed to the fumes of burning cordite, which penetrated the after part of the ship where the gunroom and warrant officers were sleeping. These officers were all killed or died later, the midshipman on watch being the only survivor.

\* For these gallant services both Carver and Smart received the D S O

Several air raids took place while we were at Salonika, including one by a Zeppelin, which caused a good deal of damage on shore. It or another returned in May, while we were away in the *Triad*, but this time it was shot down and fell in flames in the Varda Marshes. Four officers and eight men who survived were taken prisoners. Admiral Moreau—who had succeeded Admiral Gauchet—sent Admiral de Robeck a piece of the fabric labelled : *Un morceau de peau du bête*. The French set up the skeleton on the sea front at Salonika.

By the beginning of May, the new organisation was in good working order and I felt that I might now be spared, and with the Admiral's approval, I wrote to Sir John Jellicoe and Sir David Beatty to say that I was available for service in the Grand Fleet, and at the same time the Admiral telegraphed to the Admiralty to ask that I might be considered for command of a battleship or battle cruiser. He suggested to me that as I had been a Commodore for six years, I might well aspire to the command of a cruiser squadron, but I felt that I ought to go through the mill and command a capital ship, much as I looked forward to the command of a cruiser squadron in due course.

Admiral Jellicoe replied that he would welcome me in the Grand Fleet, and Beatty said that I must have one of the new "Gallopers" (*Repulse* or *Renown*), but the Naval Secretary replied to the Admiral that although I should have the first available command, this was not likely to occur until August, when the first of the new "R" class would be commissioning. So I made up my mind to wait patiently until August ; but before the end of May, Admiral de Robeck was offered the command of the Third Battle Squadron, and told me that he would shortly be relieved by Admiral Thursby (then in command of the British ships in the Adriatic) and that I might return home with him. We were waiting for our reliefs, when on 1st June we heard the German wireless shouting to the world, that their High Sea Fleet had won a great victory, against a superior force of the British Fleet, between the Skagerack and Horn Reef. They claimed to have destroyed the *Queen Mary*, *Indefatigable*, *Invincible*, two armoured cruisers of the "Achilles" class, several new destroyer leaders, large numbers of destroyers and one submarine, and to have damaged a great line of battleships by gunfire and torpedo-boat flotilla attack during the night. They

claimed to have struck the *Marlborough*, among others, by torpedo. The only losses they admitted to were the cruiser *Wiesbaden* sunk by gunfire during the day, and the old battleship *Pommern* by a torpedo during the night; and the old cruiser *Frauenlob* and a few torpedo-boats missing.

Our wireless was silent, and it was many hours before we received the Admiralty's Press communication, which in itself was not too comforting. A day or two later the German Press wireless claimed the biggest naval victory of the world for the German Fleet. The British Navy's shares went down to zero at Salonika. We received nothing official from the Admiralty, and were left in unhappy ignorance of what had actually occurred for several days.

On 8th June, the Admiralty asked the Admiral to send me home at once, if I could be spared. The *Triad* was to leave on the 11th June to pick up Admiral Thursby and his Staff at Reggio, so I sailed in her with Brady, my coxswain, and from Reggio went to Rome, where I met Admiral Thursby and spent some hours with him, before our respective trains left in opposite directions. I found Thursby knew very little about the Battle of Jutland and the truth had evidently not leaked out before he left England, but he said that he gathered that we inflicted much heavier losses than the Germans admitted. I went on to Paris that evening and thence via Havre to Southampton, arriving there on Sunday, 18th June, where my wife met me and drove me home to Fareham.

## CHAPTER II

### GRAND FLEET

I study reports of Battle of Jutland at Admiralty ; Take command of *Centurion* in Scapa Flow.

I WAS still in ignorance as to why I had been hurried home, so telephoned to the Naval Secretary as soon as possible, and learnt from him that the deaths of Admirals Sir Robert Arbuthnot and Horace Hood, who were killed at Jutland, had left me second on the list of Captains, and that I might be promoted to Rear-Admiral any day. He went on to say that I had better go to a battleship at once, and not wait for a battle cruiser, for although I could remain in command of a ship after I was promoted, until an Admiral's appointment fell vacant, I could not be appointed to command a ship after I had become a Rear-Admiral.

He then suggested that I should go to the *Centurion* in the Second Battle Squadron, which Michael Culme Seymour was leaving to take up an Admiral's appointment. Of course, I gladly accepted and went up to report myself to the Admiralty the following morning. The next day His Majesty did me the honour of receiving me at Buckingham Palace.

After spending a couple of days in London, mainly studying reports of the Battle of Jutland with Captain W. R. Hall—the Director of Naval Intelligence—I went home for a few days' leave, which I felt pretty safe in taking, as Hall assured me that the German Fleet had been sufficiently roughly handled to keep it in harbour for a few weeks.

I learnt that the three battle squadrons of the Grand Fleet which were based on Scapa Flow, took it in turns to go to Invergordon for about three weeks at a time. At that time I could see no end to the War, and as this arrangement made it possible to see something of one's family in daylight hours, if one could find accommodation within easy reach of Invergordon

or Cromarty, my wife said she would try to take a house in that neighbourhood and move up there if possible, as I had seen nothing of my children since the War began.

On 26th June we travelled North. After the sleeping cars were taken off at Inverness, we went on in a compartment with two young staff officers of the *Iron Duke* returning from leave, and I listened with amazement to their self-satisfied comments about the Battle of Jutland, in view of all I had learnt at the Admiralty.

However, a shipmate of theirs, to whom I mentioned their conversation, told me later how miserably unhappy and disgusted they all were in the *Iron Duke* on the morning of the 1st June, when it was known that the opportunity of decisively defeating the German High Sea Fleet had passed, and that of our great Armada, only the advanced forces had been seriously engaged during the day, and a few cruisers and destroyers during the night. Later, he said, they hypnotised themselves into a more self-satisfied frame of mind.

The two officers and my wife got out at Invergordon, the former to rejoin the *Iron Duke*, which was lying there, my wife to stay with the kind and hospitable Mrs. Ross of Cromarty, who helped her to look for a house. I went on to Thurso and embarking in a ferry steamer, crossed the Pentland Firth and joined the *Centurion* in Scapa Flow about 7 p.m. on the 27th June.

After dinner, a Rear-Admiral came on board to say good-bye to Culme Seymour, and to welcome me, also to make quite certain that I had joined the Grand Fleet with no wrong impressions about the Battle of Jutland.

I naturally sympathised with him for the misfortune which had deprived his squadron of taking any serious part in the action, but he assured me that it was quite unnecessary for the Grand Fleet to fight the High Sea Fleet. "If we never leave the Flow we win the War," he declared. So apparently, according to his school, our gallant sorely-tried Army was to fight on, while the Navy looked on and held the ring. This was painfully reminiscent of Gallipoli, and I went to bed that night feeling very depressed, but knowing the true temper of the Great Fleet I had joined, I soon brushed away such distressing ideas, and thought only of the day when all the disappointments of the last two years would be wiped out in a glorious naval victory,

a thought which was my constant companion for the next 15 months.

A great many accounts of the Battle of Jutland have been written, both before and after all the reports were available. I think, however, naval students will look for "Justice and Truth" and an "Authentic History" in the pages of the "Narrative of the Battle of Jutland," the accuracy of which cannot be questioned, for it contains a clear official statement of fact without comment or deductions, free from prejudice and bias, compiled after a searching and exhaustive investigation of all British and available German reports by experienced and trustworthy naval officers.

For the spirit of the Navy, they could not do better than turn to the "Fighting at Jutland," an unassuming record of the personal experiences of a number of officers and men who took part in the battle in different vessels, which should be an inspiration to a younger generation seeking for guidance.

There is much for naval officers to learn from the proceedings of the opposing fleets on 31st May and 1st June, 1916, and during my service in the Grand Fleet, I studied every phase of the Battle of Jutland, in order to try to learn its lessons.

The following account records my impressions at the time, from personal contact with officers engaged in the battle; and a study of the British and German official reports added to other information which is now available.

## CHAPTER III

### BATTLE OF JUTLAND. DAY ACTION

ON 31st May, 1916, Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty, commanding the Battle Cruiser Force, flying his flag in the *Lion*, was leading the First Battle Cruiser Squadron (Rear-Admiral O. de B. Brock), with the Second Battle Cruiser Squadron (Rear-Admiral W. Pakenham) three miles on his starboard, and the Fifth Battle Squadron (Rear-Admiral H. Evan Thomas) five miles on his port bow.\* Acting under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, Beatty was standing to the northward to join him, after carrying out a sweep eastward towards the Jutland Coast.

The three squadrons were zigzagging four points each way to avoid submarine attack, hence the open disposition, and they were well screened by destroyers. Twelve light cruisers in pairs were spread on a north-easterly line of bearing, the centre of the cruiser screen being about seven miles astern of the First Battle Cruiser Squadron.

At 2.20 the light cruiser *Galatea* (Commodore E. Alexander-Sinclair) on the starboard flank of the screen reported "Enemy in sight." At 2.28 she could be heard engaging the enemy, and she gave further information by wireless during the next few minutes. The two cruisers nearest the *Galatea* closed her at once, and the whole cruiser line moved to their support without waiting for orders.

There must necessarily always be a lag between the time a signal is dictated in one ship and read by the recipient in another, whether it be dispatched by wireless, flags, semaphore or search-light. The *Galatea's* 2.20 signal was a warning to Beatty, Evan Thomas and all who heard it, to be ready to make rapid decisions,

\* The Fifth Battle Squadron was temporarily attached to the Battle Cruiser Force while the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron was carrying out gunnery practices at Scapa Flow.

and it is on record that a signal from the *Lion* was received in the *Barham* (Flagship Fifth Battle Squadron) at 2.30, indicating that Beatty intended to steer S.S.E., his object being, of course, to cut off the enemy from the Horn Reef.

It was the custom in the Grand Fleet to make such preparatory signals, in order to give the destroyers time to take up their stations for screening their squadron on the new course. If there was time, a signal was then made to the destroyers by flags, and the squadron waited until they were taking up their new positions before altering course. But it was a point of honour with all destroyer Captains with whom I came in contact to get out of one's way ; one or two blasts on the siren being sufficient, in case of emergency, to indicate which way one proposed to turn.

The Rear-Admiral commanding the Fifth Battle Squadron, had received precisely the same information from the *Galatea* as Admiral Beatty, the preparatory signal had been received at 2.30, and Beatty's alteration of course at 2.32 could be clearly seen in the Fifth Battle Squadron. A Captain commanding one of these ships told me soon after what actually occurred. He had also received the *Galatea's* signals, knew that the cruiser screen was in action and had seen the battle cruisers turn ; with feverish impatience he watched golden moments pass, and remarked to his Navigator, "How long is this farce of dressing ship to continue."\* But quite unnecessary flag signals were laboriously hoisted in the *Barham* and kept flying until they were answered by each individual destroyer, with the result that when the Fifth Battle Squadron eventually turned to the S.S.E., six minutes after the Battle Cruiser Force, it was about ten miles distant, a routine zigzag during those vital moments having still further increased its distance from its more alert consorts.

There are people who attribute this lamentable delay to Beatty's failure to use this or that form of signalling, and blame him for not waiting for the Fifth Battle Squadron to close, before engaging the enemy. The enemy had on two previous occasions made for home at full speed, the moment he was aware of the presence of Beatty's superior force : is it likely that he would have waited until Beatty was reinforced by four powerful

\* Decorate the ship with flags.



battleships, with a maximum speed of two or three knots slower than his own? Beatty knew that his one chance of bringing the enemy to action was to attempt to cut off his retreat without a moment's delay, and he had every right to suppose that the Fifth Battle Squadron would conform to his movements. Besides he had every reason to think, at that time, that his six ships were, ship for ship, superior to his five possible opponents, though he was soon to be disillusioned.

Further he knew, or thought he knew, that the German battleships were still in the Jade River at 11.10 a.m., for he had intercepted a signal from the Admiralty to the Commander-in-Chief to that effect; the misconception being due to the German Commander-in-Chief's call sign being located by directional wireless in that anchorage.\*

Nevertheless we are invited, by some authors, to condemn Beatty for pursuing an inferior enemy. Had he failed to do so, he would have been utterly unworthy to command a British Fleet in war.

When Beatty brought von Hipper to action, he possessed, on paper, a considerable superiority, his six battle cruisers mounting 32 13.5-inch and 16 12-inch guns, against 16 12-inch and 30 11-inch guns in the five German battle cruisers.

The action opened at 3.49. Photographs prove, and it is an accepted fact, that during the first phase of the action, the British ships were clearly silhouetted against the western horizon, whereas the enemy's ships were barely visible, and sometimes could only be distinguished by the flashes of their guns, and the dull red glare of shells bursting on them.

At about 4 p.m. the *Lion* was struck by a shell, which entered her "Q" turret and killed or wounded nearly everyone in the turret and working chamber. Fortunately the officer of the turret (Major Harvey, R.M.L.I.) though mortally wounded, gave orders to close the magazine doors and flood the magazines; which saved the ship 20 minutes later, when a fire, started by the explosion in the turret, reached some cordite charges, causing a flash of flame to pass from the gunhouse to the closed magazine doors and kill all the survivors of the original explosion.†

A few minutes later the *Indefatigable* (Captain C. Sowerby)

\* According to a German report, this had been done for "the express purpose of misleading the enemy." "Admiral von Hipper," page 207.

† A posthumous V.C. was awarded to Major Harvey.

was struck by a salvo near her main mast, which appeared to damage her steering gear; shortly afterwards another salvo hit her near her foremost turret, a terrific explosion followed and she rolled over and sank, taking with her 1,022 officers and men.

Attributing this calamity to the lack of protection in our ships against plunging shell at the long range at which the action was being fought, Beatty ordered his Flag Captain to alter two points to port, i.e. to close the enemy.

At 4.26 a salvo from the *Derfflinger* struck the *Queen Mary* (Captain C. Prowse) abreast of her "Q" turret and she blew up with a tremendous explosion—1,266 of her company perished. According to a German account, "The *Queen Mary* shot splendidly and hit the *Derfflinger* with her two last salvoes, almost at the moment she herself blew up."\*

A little later the *Princess Royal* (Captain Walter Cowan) disappeared for a few moments in a cloud of smoke, which accompanied a violent explosion, and a signalman reported laconically: "Please, sir, the *Princess Royal* has gone." Fortunately this was a false alarm.

Turning to his Flag Captain, Beatty said: "There must be something wrong with our ruddy ships, Chatfield." These reverses might well have daunted a less valiant spirit, for there obviously *was* something very wrong with the design of his ships, and he might well have fallen back for support on the Fifth Battle Squadron. However, he was determined not to allow the enemy battle cruisers to escape this time, and he continued to pursue them to the southward. We know now that our ships inflicted considerable damage on the enemy, though they were not given credit for it at the time.

Meanwhile the Fifth Battle Squadron, spoiling to get into action, had made strenuous efforts, and thanks to converging courses, had been able to reduce its distance from the battle cruisers to about seven miles, and at 4.08 p.m. was firing at very long range at the two rear ships of the enemy and hit the *Vonder Tann* at once.

About the same time, Beatty ordered his destroyers to attack, and eight vessels of the Ninth and Thirteenth Flotillas were able to get into a favourable position to do so by 4.15, when they stood

\* "Kiel and Jutland," being the English translation of "Die Zwei Weissen Vollen," by Commander Georg Von Hase, First Gunnery Officer of S.M.S. *Derfflinger*.

towards the enemy battle cruisers at full speed, led by Commander the Hon. Barry Bingham in the *Nestor*.

The German destroyers, supported later by a light cruiser, came out to meet them, and a fierce fight ensued between the lines ; but considerably closer to the enemy battle cruisers than to ours, with the result that our destroyers came under a very heavy fire from them, as well as from the opposing destroyers. Two German destroyers were sunk, and first the *Nomad* (Lieut.-Commander P. Whitfield) and then the *Nestor* were disabled by shells in their engine-rooms, but not before the intrepid Bingham, followed by the *Nicator* (Lieutenant J. Mocatta), had pressed home his attack and fired torpedoes within 3,000 yards of the enemy battle cruisers.

The destroyer attack had the effect of throwing off the enemy's fire, their ships having to alter course to avoid torpedoes. On the other hand, while it was in progress, the *Lützow* was heavily hit by shells from the *Lion* and *Princess Royal*, which caused a severe fire and forced her out of the line for 15 minutes. One of the German destroyers was sunk by a torpedo from the *Petard*, but it was not known until later from German sources, that the *Seydlitz* was also struck by a torpedo in this attack.\*

We know now that the German destroyers fired 12 torpedoes at our battle cruisers, but thanks to the resolute action of our destroyers, these were fired outside their effective range and did not reach our ships.

At 4.33 the *Southampton*—flying the broad pennant of Commodore W. Goodenough, commanding the Second Light Cruiser Squadron—then about three miles ahead of the battle cruisers, signalled to the *Lion*, "Enemy Battle Fleet in sight." At 4.38 he wirelessly a detailed report, which was received within two minutes in the *Barham*, and by Sir John Jellicoe in the *Iron Duke* 50 miles away. This was unexpected news both to the Commander-in-Chief and to Beatty, who, relying on the Admiralty's report, thought the German High Sea Fleet had not left the Jade River.

Von Hipper having led Beatty to his Commander-in-Chief turned 16 points and took station ahead of his battleships. Beatty turned likewise at 4.45, and stood to the northward with a signal flying ordering the Fifth Battle Squadron to do the

\* Although Scheer declares that none of our torpedoes hit their objectives ! "Germany's High Sea Fleet in the World War." Page 145.

same.\* At the same time he informed the Commander-in-Chief of the situation by wireless through the *Princess Royal*.

Meantime the *Barham* (Captain A. W. Craig), which had received the *Southampton's* signal at 4.40 reporting the enemy's Battle Fleet, stood on to the southward, and passing the battle cruisers about one and a half miles on her port hand at 4.50, led the Fifth Battle Squadron round 16 points to starboard at 4.53. But the battleships and battle cruisers were passing one another at a speed of not less than 50 knots, and by the time the turn was completed, they were three and a half miles apart, and the Fifth Battle Squadron was then within range of the enemy's Battle Fleet, which concentrated on its turning point and inflicted considerable damage on the *Barham* and *Warspite* (Captain E. Phillpotts).

It is almost incredible that Beatty, who had been so heavily engaged, with much to occupy his attention, should again be blamed, this time for having failed to keep the Fifth Battle Squadron out of trouble.

The positions of Hipper and Beatty were now reversed, and the latter's one object was to keep in contact with the German battle cruisers, and lead the enemy to the Grand Fleet; while his cruisers kept touch with the enemy Battle Fleet, a duty which was valiantly performed by Goodenough, who stood in under a heavy fire, to ascertain its strength and composition, and kept it in sight throughout the run to the northward.

The crippled *Nestor* and *Nomad* were still afloat when the High Sea Fleet appeared upon the scene. The *Petard* (Lieut.-Commander E. C. O. Thomson) closed the *Nestor* and offered to take her in tow, but Bingham seeing that his ship was doomed, and anxious not to risk another, ordered him to withdraw. The two cripples fired all their remaining torpedoes at the approaching German Fleet before they were overwhelmed by a tremendous fire and sank with their colours flying. The survivors were picked up later by German destroyers and became prisoners of war. Thus ended a gallant episode worthy of the fighting traditions of the Battle Cruiser Force.†

A few minutes after their turn to the northward, the battle cruisers renewed their engagement, and the *Lion* received two

\* The *Lion's* wireless and searchlights had been destroyed.

† Commander Bingham was awarded the V.C.

hits, which caused a good many casualties. The visibility was still very unfavourable and owing to the enemy reducing speed, possibly in order to keep touch with his battleships, or perhaps on account of the *Seydlitz* having been torpedoed, our battle cruisers drew ahead and lost contact soon after 5 p.m.

Meanwhile the Fifth Battle Squadron was heavily engaging the German battleships' van and the two rear ships of their battle cruisers. The *Barham* and *Warspite* suffered severely before they succeeded in drawing clear of the German concentration. The *Valiant* (Captain M. Woolcombe), however, managed to turn well clear of her leader's wake, and escaped without being hit then, or in the run to the northward. The *Malaya* (Captain the Hon. A. Boyle) was the last ship in the line, and, although she turned short to avoid the danger point, the leading German battleships soon concentrated their fire on her, with the result that she sustained a good deal of damage and a number of casualties.

The German Official History states that during this phase: "The Fifth Battle Squadron bore more and more the full brunt of the action, thus effectually covering the British battle cruisers. In addition, the ships stood out well against the yellow western horizon, whilst the German vessels were almost completely invisible in the haze along the darker eastern sky, and could only be made out by the flashes of their guns. . . . Nevertheless, the fire of the Fifth Battle Squadron had been quite effective. . . . The *Grosser Kurfürst*, *Markgraf*, *Lützow*, *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz* all being hit by them,\* whilst shells falling all round the ships threw up tremendous columns of water and showered splinters all over their decks."†

In fact the Fifth Battle Squadron put up a great fight, and our new battleships stood up well to the punishment they received, and except for some damage to their secondary armament, came out of this encounter with their fighting efficiency unimpaired.

We know now that the accuracy and range of our 15-inch guns (used for the first time in a naval action) to which the enemy battle cruisers were unable to reply, caused them a good deal of concern, and they drew away out of range about 5.30.

When our four surviving battle cruisers lost contact with the enemy's five vessels the *Princess Royal* had her after-turret (i.e. 25

\* The *Tiger* hit *Seydlitz* at 5.06 and at 5.10 hit four of her turrets at 18,800 yards.

† "Der Krieg zur See, 1914-18," "North Sea," Vol. V.

per cent. of her main armament) out of action and about 100 killed and wounded; the *Tiger* (Captain H. B. Pelly) was making water, had her "Q" magazine flooded, and about 60 casualties; the *Lion* had her "Q" turret out of action, all her communications destroyed, and six officers and 93 men killed and 44 wounded.

At 5.25, after a brief respite of about 20 minutes to remove the killed and wounded and restore communications, Beatty ordered the battle cruisers to prepare to renew the action, and standing in towards the enemy, he opened fire at 5.40 on Hipper's Squadron at 14,000 yards, and rapidly closing the range to 13,000 yards, forced him to turn away. This time the visibility was all in our favour, the sun being in the eyes of the Germans. After receiving very severe punishment, and being unable to reply effectively, Hipper broke off the action after 13 minutes and withdrew to the eastward.

At 6.7, hearing heavy firing ahead, Hipper decided to retire on his Battle Fleet, his flagship, the *Lützow*, being ablaze and very badly damaged by the fire of the battle cruisers. (The *Lion* and *Princess Royal* had concentrated on her.)

The firing to the eastward was that of the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron, commanded by Rear-Admiral the Hon. Horace Hood in the *Invincible*, who now entered the arena. His squadron had come south from Scapa Flow with the Grand Fleet, and was about 25 miles ahead of it, when at 4 p.m. in accordance with the Commander-in-Chief's orders, Hood proceeded at full speed to rejoin Beatty, accompanied by the light cruisers *Canterbury* and *Chester*, which were stationed five miles on either beam. At about 5.40 the *Chester* fell in with four enemy light cruisers, which had just been chased to the southward by four armoured cruisers, led by Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot in the *Defence*. The light cruisers were giving the *Chester* a very bad time until Hood closed rapidly to support her and drove off the enemy, who left the *Wiesbaden* behind badly damaged and the *Pillau* also suffered severely.

Four destroyers, which had acted as a submarine screen to the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron during the run from the north, led by Commander Loftus Jones in the *Shark*, delivered a most spirited attack on the *Chester's* adversaries. The *Shark* came under a heavy fire and was disabled, her next astern—the *Acasta* (Lieut.-Commander J. O. Barron)—stood by her leader, but

like Bingham, Loftus Jones would not allow another destroyer to share his fate, and ordered the *Acasta*, which had already suffered severely, to clear out.

While the *Shark* was lying disabled, she was attacked by several German destroyers ; her gallant Captain—who had one leg shot off at the knee—lay encouraging his men, who kept the one remaining gun in action until the *Shark* went down with her colours flying, a new ensign being hoisted by Loftus Jones' orders just before she sank. A few survivors on a Carley float were picked up by a Danish steamer many hours later.\*

While his advance forces were thus heavily engaged, Sir John Jellicoe was racing south with 24 battleships—steaming at their utmost speed—eight armoured cruisers, nine light cruisers and 65 destroyers. The battleships were in six equal divisions, in line ahead disposed abeam, led by the *Marlborough*, *Colossus*, *Benbow*, *Iron Duke*, *Orion* and *King George V*, from starboard to port respectively (see plan, page 50).

The Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron was four miles ahead of the Battle Fleet ; and the armoured cruisers which, in accordance with the Battle Orders, should have been spread 20 miles ahead of the Battle Fleet, owing to their poor speed had not had time to get more than about eight or nine miles ahead of it.

In the low visibility which prevailed, without an extended screen to give him information, the situation which faced the Commander-in-Chief was a fearfully difficult one, as the enemy's main force was closing at the rate of about 40 knots an hour.

The dead reckoning of the various detached forces, after many hours at sea, was unlikely to be very accurate, particularly in the case of the advanced forces which had been heavily engaged. We know now that the *Iron Duke* herself was four and a half miles to the S.E. and the *Lion* six and three-quarter miles to the westward of their reckoning.

A wrong solution of the problem of deployment might well have had fatal results, and Sir John waiting for further information, held on until a moment arrived when immediate decision was absolutely imperative.

Shortly before 6 p.m. heavy firing could be heard right ahead and on his starboard beam. This came from our battle cruisers and those of the enemy respectively. At 6 p.m. the *Iron Duke*

\* Loftus Jones was awarded a posthumous V.C.

sighted the *Lion*—about five miles S.W. steering east—and the latter reported the enemy's battle cruisers bearing S.E. At the same time the *Marlborough* reported the *Barham* about four miles S.W. steering to the eastward. At 6.10 the *Barham* reported the enemy's battleships S.S.E., this information was received in the *Iron Duke* at 6.14, almost simultaneously with a signal from the *Lion* reporting the enemy's battleships bearing S.S.W. Sir John states that the bearing of the enemy Battle Fleet, as given by the *Lion* and *Barham* respectively gave a fair "cut."\*

It was unfortunate that the Commander-in-Chief had no extended screen which could have got into touch with his detached forces, and given him information on which he could have acted earlier and before contact was so imminent.

Immediate action was indeed essential, as Sir John Jellicoe records :

"There was no time to lose as there was evident danger of the starboard wing column of the Battle Fleet being engaged by the whole German Battle Fleet before deployment could be effected. So at 6.16 p.m. a signal was made to the Battle Fleet to form line of battle on the port wing column, on a course S.E. by E., it being assumed that the course of the enemy was approximately the same as that of our battle cruisers."†

When the deployment commenced, the battle cruisers proceeded full speed to take up their stations ahead of the "King George V" division, and the Commander-in-Chief reduced speed to 14 knots to enable them to do so rapidly.

The signal for the reduction of speed took some time to get through the long line of ships, with the result that ships bunched up and masked one another's range. The cruisers and destroyers of the Battle Fleet, which were well placed for deployment on the starboard wing column (that nearest the enemy), whilst proceeding to take up their stations ahead of the port wing column, fouled the range of a number of battleships with their smoke.

\* "The Grand Fleet, 1914-1916," by Admiral Viscount Jellicoe, page 350.

† *ibid.*, page 348.



The Fifth Battle Squadron, which had also expected a deployment on the starboard wing column, and was in a position to take up its battle station ahead of the *Marlborough*, could not get ahead of the "King George V" column without masking the fire of the Battle Fleet, and the Rear-Admiral decided to take station astern of the "Marlborough" column. In doing so the *Warspite's* helm jammed at a critical moment, and she made a complete circle which carried her within close range of the enemy's Battle Fleet, which inflicted considerable damage. Incidentally this turn probably saved the *Warrior* (Captain B. Molteno), which with the *Defence* was five miles ahead of the Battle Fleet, and emerged from the mist within range of enemy battleships. Two salvoes struck the *Defence* and she blew up with a tremendous explosion in a blaze of flame. Her gallant Admiral (Sir Robert Arbuthnot) and 906 officers and men perished. The *Warrior* was sorely damaged and would probably have shared her fate, but for the *Warspite's* inadvertent intervention, which enabled her to withdraw, but she sank a few hours later.

Meanwhile, after extricating the *Chester*, Hood led the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron full speed towards the sound of guns to the westward, but sighting the *Lion* approaching on an easterly course, he swung his squadron round to take station ahead of her at 6.20. At this moment the German battle cruisers were sighted to the southward, and at 6.23 his squadron opened fire at a range of 10,000 yards and hit the *Derfflinger* several times. At 6.31 the *Derfflinger* hit the *Invincible*, on her "Q" turret, causing an explosion which literally cut her in two. For a long time her bow and stern could be seen standing up out of the sea, a considerable distance apart; thus passed the gallant Hood and 1,030 officers and men. Two officers and four men were picked up by one of our destroyers.

Undismayed by their leader's fate, the *Inflexible* (Captain E. Heaton Ellis) and the *Indomitable* (Captain F. W. Kennedy) continued the action furiously, and a few minutes later von Hipper, whose ships had obviously suffered very severely, turned away to the westward.

The *Lützow* was badly down by the bows, listing heavily with enormous volumes of smoke pouring out of her forecastle. A German account says that: "A heavy turret was hurled

overboard and water poured into the forward compartments, the gunnery control and the torpedo broadside room. The ship was obviously settling by the head and could only steam at 15 knots, subsequently reduced to eight.”\* She soon lost touch with her consorts and the command of the German battle cruisers devolved on the Captain of the *Derfflinger*—which herself was in a bad way. Von Hipper seems to have been very loath to leave the *Lützow*, but at 7 p.m. he was persuaded by his Staff to do so, and transferred to a destroyer, meaning to hoist his flag in the *Seydlitz*. The *Lützow* having lost her squadron steamed slowly away to the southward.

When von Hipper eventually found the *Seydlitz*, the German account continues: “It was realised that the latter also had suffered serious damage; there was a hole as big as a barn door in her bows, and hundreds of tons of water could be heard gurgling inside her. Worst of all, her wireless was also out of action. There was nothing for it but to move on to the *Von der Tann*. But even she was hardly fit to play the part of a flagship. Her heavy guns were as good as out of action.” One of the “König” class was suggested by his Staff: “but Hipper—anxious not to fail his squadron—decided to try his luck with the *Moltke*, ‘I have got 1,000 tons of water on board’ was the report of her Commander, ‘but otherwise I am fit for your purpose!’”† However, before Hipper could embark in her, his devoted squadron, which had suffered so terribly, was to face a further ordeal.

In the meantime our Battle Fleet had been engaged.

The first enemy vessel to be sighted and fired at by our battleships was the cruiser *Wiesbaden*, which like the *Nestor* and *Nomad*, was lying disabled and became a target for a number of battleships as they passed. She was hit by several heavy projectiles, but—like the German battle cruisers—appeared to be unsinkable, and did not in fact sink until seven hours later.

Between 6.25 and 6.40, while the deployment was in progress, enemy battleships appeared from time to time out of the smoke and mist, at ranges from 12,000 to 14,000 yards, and were heavily fired on by individual battleships whenever they were

\* “Admiral von Hipper,” by Captain von Waldeyer-Hartz, page 208.

† *ibid.*, pages 208 to 210.

seen, and were repeatedly hit. The visibility was now all in our favour, and according to German accounts, they could only distinguish our ships by the flashes of the guns. Their reply was quite ineffective, and during this intermittent engagement, lasting about 20 minutes, they did not succeed in hitting a single battleship in our long line of 24. At 6.35 Scheer, realising his perilous situation, turned his whole fleet 16 points together, and withdrew at full speed to the westward behind a smoke-screen made by his destroyers.

We know now that the appearance of the Grand Fleet was a complete surprise to Admiral Scheer, though I think he might well have expected to have found our Battle Fleet much closer to its advanced forces.

Whether the deployment carried out by the Grand Fleet was the best possible, in the difficult circumstances in which Admiral Jellicoe found himself, will always be a matter of opinion. But the fact remains that the course on which he deployed, on the assumption "that the enemy's course was approximately that of our battle cruisers" (i.e. at that time "to the eastward") placed him across the enemy's T, who were in fact on a north-north-easterly course, almost at right angles to the one he assumed them to be steering. Moreover, by 6.40 his great fleet was deployed approximately in battle order between the entire German High Sea Fleet and its base, from which it was steaming away at high speed.

But the situation had apparently arrived which Sir John Jellicoe had visualised when he wrote to the Admiralty on 19th October, 1914:

"The Germans have shown that they rely to a very great extent on submarines, mines and torpedoes, and there can be no doubt whatever that they will endeavour to make the fullest possible use of these weapons in a fleet action, especially since they possess an actual superiority over us in these particular directions. It therefore becomes necessary to consider our own tactical methods in relation to these forms of attack. . . .

If, for instance, the enemy battle fleet were to turn away from an advancing fleet, I should assume that the intention

was to lead us over mines and submarines, and should decline to be so drawn.

I desire particularly to draw the attention of their Lordships to this point, since it may be deemed a refusal of battle, and, indeed, might possibly result in failure to bring the enemy to action as soon as is expected and hoped.

Such a result would be absolutely repugnant to the feelings of all British naval officers and men, but with new and untried methods of warfare new tactics must be devised to meet them.

I feel that such tactics, if not understood, may bring odium upon me, but so long as I have the confidence of their Lordships, I intend to pursue what is, in my considered opinion, the proper course to defeat and annihilate the enemy battle fleet, without regard to uninstructed opinion or criticism.

The situation is a difficult one. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that half of our battle fleet might be disabled by under-water attack before the guns opened fire at all, if a false step is made, and I feel that I must constantly bear in mind the great probability of such attack and be prepared tactically to prevent its success.”\*

At that time we had only a small margin of superiority, but since then the Grand Fleet had been reinforced by five “Queen Elizabeths” and three “Revengees.” Four of the former and two of the latter were in company with him. Two more “Revengees” and the battle cruisers *Repulse* and *Renown*, mounting 15-inch guns, as well as three powerful cruisers, *Furious* and *Courageous*, mounting four 15-inch guns, and *Glorious*, two 18-inch guns, were nearing completion.

The enemy Battle Fleet opposed to ours consisted of 16 dreadnought battleships mounting 12-inch and 11-inch guns, and six old pre-dreadnought battleships which were really not fit to lie in the line.

The acceptance of some risks would appear to have been justified, but Sir John Jellicoe’s immense responsibilities bore heavily on him, and his tactics throughout the rest of the battle were governed by the fear of torpedo attack, which he anticipated

\* “Battle of Jutland Official Despatch,” Appendix IV.

would immediately follow the enemy's turn away. Instead of pursuing the enemy, therefore, he altered course by divisions to south, in order to frustrate the attack of a submarine which had been reported, and hostile destroyers which had been seen approaching from the S.W.\*

It would seem that the moment had now arrived for the Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron and destroyers—superior in numbers and gunfire to those of the enemy—to dash out and drive off the threatened destroyer attack. I am sure that they were spoiling to prove their mettle, and were only too anxious to be led into the fray, but no orders came from the *Iron Duke*, and apparently their own leaders were not prepared to act upon their own initiative.

However the expected German massed attack never materialised; though ordered by Scheer, the German destroyer leader recalled it, but two destroyers pressed on and fired six torpedoes at the battle cruisers, four of which were seen by the *Princess Royal* and *Tiger*. At the same time some destroyers were sent to rescue the crew of the *Wiesbaden*. They did not succeed in doing so, but two of these fired four torpedoes, probably one of these, or possibly a torpedo from the *Wiesbaden* herself, hit the *Marlborough* at 6.55.

This happened at an unfortunate moment, and her signal that she had hit a mine or been torpedoed probably hardened the Commander-in-Chief's determination to run no unnecessary risks. Nevertheless, the *Marlborough* maintained her place in the line and a speed of 17 knots for the next seven hours, despite the fact that she had a list of seven degrees, and the stokers in one stokehold were working up to their knees in water.

The vital importance of keeping contact with the retreating enemy was fully appreciated by our light cruiser squadrons, and Goodenough, who was well to the westward in the *Southampton*, seeing their turn, boldly followed them. Shortly before 7 p.m., he reported that they had altered course to E.S.E. This signal was received in the *Iron Duke* at 7 p.m. five minutes after the enemy actually turned (13 miles away) to a course

\* There were no submarines present, although in the Commander-in-Chief's despatch of 18th June, 1916, he stated: "There is much strong evidence of the presence of enemy submarines in the vicinity of the scene of action."

which brought the van of their battleships and battle cruisers under the concentrated fire of practically the whole Grand Fleet, and once again Jellicoe had the good fortune to find himself across Scheer's T and in a position to annihilate him.

Scheer claims to have committed this amazing tactical blunder deliberately, if he did so, he soon had reason to regret it.

We know from a German account, that as von Hipper was trying to transfer from a destroyer to the *Moltke*, a signal was received from Scheer: "Battle cruisers attack the enemy."\* And most gallantly the *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz*, *Von der Tann* and *Moltke* responded.

At 7.12 their van appeared and came under a tremendous fire, the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz* being engaged by 11 battleships of the First, Fourth and Fifth Battle Squadrons at a range of under 10,000 yards. Two of the Fifth Battle Squadron fired at the *Von der Tann*. A few moments later the van of the German battleships appeared and were engaged by the *Iron Duke* and ships of the First, Second and Fourth Battle Squadrons. Almost every ship in our long line of battle, and our battle cruisers found a target; the *Marlborough* despite her list, fired 14 rapid salvos at a ship of the "Markgraf" class, and claims to have hit her. Some of the ships of the Second Battle Squadron, including the *Centurion*, fired at a ship at about 18,000 to 19,000 yards, which was probably the *Lützow* escaping to the southward.

The light was still all in our favour and the German reply was negligible. Of the 33 British battleships and battle cruisers which took part in this short engagement, the *Colossus* was the only ship hit. Two shells fired either by the *Derfflinger* or *Seydlitz* struck her, causing very slight damage and wounding five men.

After his battleships had been under fire for six or seven minutes, Scheer again turned 16 points together to the westward, and ordered his battle cruisers and destroyers to attack to cover his retreat. A few minutes later, having survived our Battle Fleet's onslaught for nearly 13 minutes, the German battle cruisers also turned under cover of a smoke-screen, and an attack by their destroyers developed.

It will always be a matter of opinion whether the British battleships would not have done better to turn towards this

\* "Admiral von Hipper," page 210.

torpedo attack, a manœuvre which many experienced officers claim would have been just as effective in avoiding torpedoes, and would moreover have enabled them to keep touch with their thoroughly discomfited enemy. However the Commander-in-Chief, on whom the responsibility lay, adhered to his expressed determination and turned away at 7.25, thus ending the second and last brief engagement between the British and German main forces.

This time the Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron and eight destroyers of the Eleventh Flotilla moved out to attack the enemy's destroyers, but the Commander-in-Chief ordered the cruisers not to go too near the enemy Battle Fleet, and no action resulted. However, the German destroyers having fired 21 torpedoes at long range made off. Twenty torpedoes were reported to have been seen and avoided by our battleships.

We had been led to believe that the enemy's destroyers would be a great menace and a decisive factor in a battle. They were given credit for having been trained to deliver massed attacks with great determination, and for having the intention of driving their attacks home quite regardless of loss. It is true that the German destroyers *were* a decisive factor in the Battle of Jutland, although they never really succeeded in driving home an attack during daylight hours, or delivering a single attack during the night.

Admiral Jellicoe's tactics for safeguarding his ships were completely successful, the only British ship torpedoed during the whole course of the battle being the *Marlborough*, and she had proved that her belligerent spirit and her fighting efficiency were not impaired.

For the next ten minutes our Battle Fleet was steering S.E. and the enemy west. At 7.35, having escaped the torpedo menace, Admiral Jellicoe signalled to the Fleet to form single line ahead, course S. by W.

Meanwhile the *Lion*, which was about six miles to the S.W. of the van of the Battle Fleet, keeping contact with the enemy, signalled to the Commander-in-Chief at 7.40 that the enemy bore N.W. by W. 10 to 11 miles. This signal was received in the *Iron Duke* two minutes later, and the course of the Battle Fleet was altered to S.W. At 7.45 Beatty signalled by searchlight through the *Minotaur*, Second Cruiser Squadron

(which was acting as a link midway between the battleships and battle cruisers), to inform the leading battleship that the enemy bore N.W. by W. and were steering S.W., and at 7.47 he signalled: "Submit that the van of the battleships follow me, we can then cut off the whole enemy's fleet."\* A few minutes later Beatty altered course to W. by S. to close the enemy. This signal was made by wireless, but was not received in the *Iron Duke* until shortly after 8 p.m. by which time the Fleet was in single line ahead, led by *King George V*, steering S.W. Admiral Jellicoe then hauled round by divisions to west, and increased speed to 17 knots to close the enemy, but his opportunity had now passed.

By this time the battle cruisers were W.S.W. of *King George V*, but were not in sight of her. Meanwhile Scheer had brought his Fleet round to south, and his whole Fleet was steaming at 16 knots, having picked up the *Lützow*, which reported that she could steam 15 knots.

The Fleets were now converging, and the Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron, boldly led by Commodore Le Mesurier in the *Calliope*, and eight destroyers of the Eleventh Flotilla, moved out to drive off a destroyer attack which was developing, and which they succeeded in breaking up.

At 8.15 the Third Light Cruiser Squadron, led by Rear-Admiral Trevelyan Napier in the *Falmouth*, which was spread ahead of the battle cruisers on a westerly course, fell in with and engaged a German light cruiser squadron which was scouting ahead of its Fleet.

Beatty at once turned to the sound of the guns and at 8.18 was again hotly engaged, first with the enemy's battle cruisers, which were hit several times and forced to turn away, and then with the German pre-dreadnought squadron, which moved out to cover their retreat; at 8.35 they also turned away to the westward from the resolute attack of our battered battle cruisers.

While this action was in progress, Le Mesurier's cruisers, which had chased some enemy destroyers to the westward, came within range of the enemy's battleships, which opened fire on the *Calliope*. However, she pressed on and fired torpedoes

\* The latter signal has been condemned and even ridiculed by some British critics—not so by the German Official Historian, who fully appreciated its significance and object.



at a range of 6,500 yards before retiring under a heavy fire from two battleships, which hit her five times and caused a number of casualties. During this action the *Calliope* was in full view of the *Iron Duke* and other battleships.

At 8.30 the *Comus* (Captain Alan Hotham) could be seen firing, and when asked by the *Iron Duke* whom she was engaging, replied : " Enemy's Battle Fleet ! "

At 8.45 the *Caroline* (Captain H. R. Crooke) and *Royalist*, (Captain the Hon. H. Meade), which were then two miles ahead of the *King George V*, sighted three enemy battleships N.W. and reported them to her, at the same time the *Caroline* ordered the *Royalist* to attack with torpedoes. The *King George V* negatived their attack, declared that they were our own battle cruisers, and reported them as such to the Commander-in-Chief. One of our flotillas, which was about to attack, consequently refrained, but the *Caroline* and *Royalist*, certain of their identity, closed them under fire and fired their torpedoes at 9 p.m. This was the last encounter before night fell.

The sun set at 8.07, but the summer twilight did not deepen until well after 9 p.m., and during the last hour and a half bolder tactics might well have achieved decisive results.

Le Mesurier's Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron had proved that it could be relied upon to drive off the enemy destroyer attacks.

Goodenough and his Second Light Cruiser Squadron which had twice carried out valuable reconnaissances, and during this period had been on the quarter of the Battle Fleet, had driven off two or three attempts of the enemy's destroyers to attack the rear of the line.

Meanwhile about 80 British destroyers appear to have been waiting for orders. I can well imagine their feelings.

The *Centurion* was the third ship in the line and only fired four salvoes in the whole course of the Battle of Jutland. Those on board her could see that there were in fact no enemy destroyers in a position to threaten the van, when the Grand Fleet turned away from the retreating enemy, to avoid a torpedo attack. They could see our battle cruisers standing to the S.W., while their ship was on a south-easterly course, and after they had lost sight of them, they could still see the cruiser squadron which was following in their wake ; and when the heavy firing

broke out afresh, they knew that the battle cruisers and light cruisers were again hotly engaged, while they were now too far away to support them.

I shall always feel thankful that I did not join the *Centurion* before the Battle of Jutland.

## CHAPTER IV

### BATTLE OF JUTLAND. NIGHT ACTION

AT 9.15 p.m., while it was still light enough for the Flag Officers and Captains to see adjacent divisions and squadrons, Admiral Jellicoe formed the four battle squadrons in line ahead, disposed abeam, and closed the columns to a mile apart, in order that they should not lose sight of one another through the night, and not mistake one another for the enemy.

Our battle cruisers maintained station about 13 miles on the starboard bow of the Battle Fleet, with the object of preventing enemy vessels regaining their base by passing round to the southward of the Battle Fleet. The First and Third Light Cruiser Squadrons were with the battle cruisers. The Fourth Light Cruiser Squadron was ahead, and the Second astern of the Battle Fleet.

All the destroyer flotillas were directed to take station five miles astern of the Battle Fleet, "in a position in which they would afford protection to the Fleet from destroyer attack, and at the same time be favourably situated for attacking the enemy's heavy ships."\*

Seven flotillas stationed thus, covered a considerable area and provided a wide screen against enemy destroyers locating our fleet from astern and working round the flanks to attack from ahead. But our destroyers were given no information as to the formation and disposition of our battle and cruiser squadrons, nor the position and probable course of the enemy, and they had no orders to attack and no instructions other than the stationing signal.

The first encounter took place at 10.15 p.m. between a German light cruiser squadron and the *Castor* and Eleventh Destroyer Flotilla, which were on the starboard quarter of the starboard

\* Sir John Jellicoe's Despatch, 18th June, 1916.

wing division of the Battle Fleet. The *Castor* suffered some casualties, and a few torpedoes were fired by three of our vessels; others refrained, being unable to distinguish friends from foes.

At 10.30, Goodenough's light cruiser squadron, then about seven miles on the starboard quarter of our Battle Fleet, fought a German light cruiser squadron. The *Southampton* and *Dublin* (Captain A. C. Scott) had a number of casualties, and the old cruiser *Frauenlob* was sunk with all hands by a torpedo fired from the *Southampton*.

Unfortunately the Commander-in-Chief's wireless signal stationing the destroyers, was read and deciphered in Germany and repeated to Scheer. At 11.30, when steering S.S.E.  $\frac{3}{4}$  E. for Horn Reef—the shortest way to his base—the van of Scheer's Fleet crashed diagonally through our unsuspecting destroyers, and he then knew the position of our Battle Fleet.

Having taken part in many destroyer night exercises, and knowing how well equipped for night work the German ships were, I can well picture the scene.

Our destroyers, steaming 17 knots to the southward, sighted dark shapes looming up on the starboard beam or quarter. Uncertain of their identity, they either challenged—making the recognition signal by flashing light—or withheld their attack until told to do so. Meanwhile the enemy, who *knew* that they were not alone, had trained their excellently controlled searchlights against us, and simultaneously with the switching on of searchlights, the guns burst into flame, smothering our unfortunate destroyers with an overwhelming fire, in most instances before they could manœuvre into a position to attack.

This was the fate of our Fourth Flotilla, gallantly led by Captain Charles Wintour in the *Tipperary*, which, with the *Sparrowhawk*, *Ardent* and *Fortune*, were sunk with very few survivors. The *Broke* and *Spitfire* were badly damaged and suffered heavy casualties. The German cruiser *Rostock* was torpedoed in this engagement and sank a few hours later, as did the cruiser *Elbing*, which was rammed by a German battleship while avoiding a British torpedo.\*

\* The crews of the *Rostock* and *Elbing* were transferred to destroyers and the vessels sunk when British ships were seen approaching in the morning.

At about midnight, the armoured cruiser *Black Prince*, which had lost touch with its squadron and was on the port quarter of our Battle Fleet, sighted the enemy, and according to a German account, made the challenge at a distance of only 1,500 yards; she was at once almost blown out of the water by five German battleships and sank with all hands.

About this same time, the *Petard*, of the Thirteenth Flotilla, which had expended all her torpedoes in the afternoon, and the *Turbulent*, of the Tenth Flotilla, having lost touch with their leader, the *Champion*, were run into by four enemy battleships. The *Petard* narrowly escaped being rammed, and suffered a number of casualties, and the *Turbulent* was sunk with the loss of five officers and 85 men.

There were many gallant individual actions in the night fighting, and one outstanding example of leadership and initiative. Captain A. Stirling, in the *Faulknor*, commanding the Twelfth Flotilla, then on the port quarter of our Battle Fleet, sighted the enemy's battleships at 1.45 a.m. He led his flotilla well clear, until he was in a position right ahead of the enemy, when he turned and running past them at full speed, torpedoed the *Pommern* (one of the pre-dreadnought battleships), which blew up with a terrific explosion and was lost with all hands.

The destroyers came under a heavy fire and the bridge and charthouse of the *Onslaught* (Lieut.-Commander A. G. Onslow) was wrecked, her Captain being mortally wounded and her First Lieutenant killed, leaving Sub-Lieutenant H. Kemmis in command to bring the battered vessel home.

Our destroyers had proved their offensive spirit, when given leadership and opportunity, and it is distressing to think of what 70 or 80 destroyers might have achieved if, instead of being given a purely defensive role, they had been directed to attack and harry the High Sea Fleet at nightfall, when its position relative to the Grand Fleet was definitely known and they were between the former and its base.

At daybreak Lieut.-Commander Roger Alison, of the *Moresby*, in company with the *Champion* and Thirteenth Flotilla, sighted four battleships of the "Deutschland" class, and hoisting a compass signal to call attention to their direction, he hauled out of the line and attacked them, sinking a German destroyer

accompanying them. If his leader and consorts had been equally alert, they might well have inflicted more serious damage. We know now that the torpedo was not seen, and the enemy attributed their loss to a mine.

These engagements, which commenced on the starboard quarter of our Battle Fleet, and worked round to its port quarter during the night, were clearly visible in the Battle Fleet, which continued its course steadily to the southward until 2.30 a.m., when it being now light, Sir John Jellicoe altered course to north and ordered the detached squadrons to conform and close the Battle Fleet.

The last contact with the enemy was made at 3.30 a.m. in broad daylight, when the *Champion* and four destroyers, standing to the northward, passed four German destroyers steaming at high speed to the southward, at a range of about 3,000 yards. The latter fired torpedoes at the *Champion*, which opened fire on them as they passed.

We know now that one of the German destroyers was hit by a six-inch shell in the engine-room and had to be taken in tow. Further that they had on board 1,040 survivors of the *Lützow*, which, having 8,000 tons of water in her, could no longer make headway and was sunk by a German torpedo after she had been abandoned. It was deplorable that the *Champion* with such superior force should have failed to pursue the enemy.

At 3.45 a.m. the Commander-in-Chief received a signal from the Admiralty giving the position, course and speed of the High Sea Fleet at 2.30 a.m.; this placed them 23 miles from the Grand Fleet and only 17 from the Horn Reef at that hour, and by the time the signal was received the two fleets were about 60 miles apart.

The Admiralty had signalled at 10.41 p.m. that the enemy had been ordered home at 9.14 p.m., and had given their position, course and speed, which would have taken them about eight miles S.W. of Horn Reef, but the position did not fit in with the report of various ships, and Admiral Jellicoe decided to reject the information. Until he received the 3.45 a.m. signal, he was not aware that the heavy fighting astern and on the quarter of the Battle Fleet was other than a succession of actions between our light forces and those of the enemy; no steps appear to have been taken to ascertain the nature of

the fighting, and no report of the passage of the High Sea Fleet through his destroyer screen reached him.\*

It is inexplicable that the *Champion*, which avoided enemy battleships at 11.30 p.m. and again at 2.30 a.m., should not have attempted to report them. The *Faulkenor's* effort to report their presence at 1.45 a.m. was blocked by the enemy; however, their failure did not really affect the situation, for Sir John Jellicoe tells us that, owing to the difficulty of collecting the scattered cruiser squadrons and destroyer flotillas, it was :

“undesirable for the Battle Fleet to close the Horn Reef at daylight, as had been my intention when deciding to steer to the southward during the night. It was obviously necessary to concentrate the Battle Fleet and the destroyers before renewing action. By the time this concentration was effected it had become apparent that the High Sea Fleet, steering for the Horn Reef, had passed behind the shelter of the German minefields in the early morning on the way to their ports.”†

So ended the Battle of Jutland, which consisted of a series of heavy engagements fought out with great determination by the advanced forces of the opposing fleets.

Two brief encounters between the battleships of the Grand Fleet and the High Sea Fleet, in which neither opponent was *determined* to seek a decision. To quote an American naval officer's account : “The two fleets rapidly separated, for Scheer would no more face the British guns than Jellicoe would risk the German torpedoes.”‡

Finally fierce fighting during the night, when the German battleships and cruisers, escaping to Horn Reef under the stern of our Battle Fleet, inadvertently ran into our screening light forces.

\* The *Malaya* and *Valiant* have been pilloried for failing to report the action they witnessed at 11.30 p.m., but as it took place in full view of their own flagship, it would have been most improper of them to have done so. When the criticism appeared, their Commanding Officers pointed this out to their Admiral and the Commander-in-Chief, and the latter declared that he had never criticised the ships of the Fifth Battle Squadron in this matter.

† “The Grand Fleet, 1914-1916,” page 385.

‡ “High Command in the World War,” by W. D. Puleston, Captain U.S. Navy (Director Naval Intelligence), page 229.

A few months after I joined the Grand Fleet I asked Sir John Jellicoe's Chief of Staff why the Fleet did not sweep towards Horn Reef at daylight on the 1st June. He replied that that was the Admiralty's fault; if they had only sent Tyrwhitt's Force to join them at daylight, the Commander-in-Chief had every intention of doing so, but the Admiralty kept Tyrwhitt standing by at Harwich, in case the enemy raided the coast. The Grand Fleet's destroyers were all scattered and the Fleet could not risk going into *submarine infested waters* without destroyer screens.

I heard from Tyrwhitt that directly he knew from intercepted signals that a battle was taking place in the North Sea, he sailed in anticipation of the order which he felt could not be long delayed, and went full speed towards the battle. However, he was peremptorily recalled, and ordered to await further instructions; the Admiralty, it seems, were afraid that under cover of the German Fleet's sortie, a detached force might raid the South-East Coast, the Thames Estuary, the Downs or the Dover Straits.\* To have to lie inactive, with the air vibrating with battle signals, must indeed have been torture to the ardent Tyrwhitt and his splendid people at Harwich.

It is sad to reflect that if the Grand Fleet had had the curiosity to sweep towards Horn Reef in the morning, even after its own destroyers had rejoined, it would have found the *Seydlitz*—abandoned by her fighting comrades and attended only by one light cruiser—gallantly struggling home all through the long daylight hours of that most unhappy 1st June.†

The *Seydlitz*, with over 5,000 tons of water in her, her fore-castle awash, and with a list of eight degrees, stood on towards Horn Reef, grounding twice before she reached it. At 9 p.m. she grounded again off Horn Reef and remained there for more than two hours. With the assistance of pumping vessels and tugs, she got off at high water and crawled on until the afternoon of the 2nd June, when she again grounded off the entrance of the Jade River, drawing 42 feet of water. Thus an unsinkable ship was brought home by a most indomitable crew. The *Seydlitz* would have blown up half a dozen times, had she been as vulnerable as our battle cruisers. According to von Hase,

\* "Naval Operations," Vol. III, page 302.

† See account in "Admiral von Hipper," pages 217 and 218.



the *Derfflinger* reached home in much the same plight. That the *Seydlitz* should have fought all day at high speed, after she was torpedoed, testifies to her admirable construction. The *Lützow*, *Rostock* and *Elbing* were also abandoned by the High Sea Fleet, but the two latter would in all probability have got home, had they not been sunk by their own crews, in order to avoid being destroyed by British ships in the morning.

Our ill-fated battle cruisers were the offspring of Lord Fisher, who was obsessed by the belief that a combination of heavy long-range guns to annihilate, and high speed to keep out of the range of the enemy, were essential qualities for carrying out the functions of armoured cruisers, though he apparently did not foresee that in the normally low visibility of the North Sea his weakly protected ships might well receive vital injury before their speed would enable them to escape.

The Falkland Island action was fought in clear weather, and our battle cruisers, with their 12-inch guns, were able to keep outside the effective range of the slower German armoured cruisers, thus fully justifying Lord Fisher's contention. No doubt our battle cruisers could be relied upon to catch and destroy all existing armoured cruisers in good visibility; but in the meantime Admiral von Tirpitz, with a clearer vision than Lord Fisher, had been preparing the German answer to our battle cruisers, and after exhaustive and costly experiment he produced ships protected to withstand torpedoes and the heavy gunfire of our capital ships, and mounting guns of equally long range, though of lighter calibre than those of their British contemporaries. It is true that von Tirpitz also sacrificed a little speed to obtain protection, but Jutland most emphatically justified his wisdom.

Apart from questions of design, it is no use pretending that the Battle of Jutland was not a bitter disappointment to naval officers of my generation, and it is not helpful to a younger generation to gloss over and make excuses for failures.

Scores of brave deeds had proved—if proof were needed—that the officers and men of the Navy possessed an offensive spirit, could be relied upon to face disaster undismayed, suffer patiently and meet death courageously. Future generations will be able to dwell on the *fighting* at Jutland with pride and contentment.

But the lesson which struck me most forcibly at the time was the absolute necessity for the senior officers of squadrons, divisions and subdivisions of the Line, and those in command of detached units, to accept responsibility, use more initiative, act promptly, offensively, and, if necessary, independently.

There can have been nothing more encouraging to the Germans than to see our ships blow up after being struck two or three times, while their own ships appeared to be able to stand unlimited punishment—and nothing more disheartening to our people than to see consorts blow up, and their own shells bursting on an apparently unsinkable enemy. That was the situation in the battle cruisers' fight at 5 p.m.

Captain von Waldeyer-Hartz (Admiral von Hipper's biographer), more just than some of Beatty's critics, refers to his leadership thus: "The spirit of the offensive burnt strong within him, in spite of the loss of two ships."\*

Referring to the battle cruiser action at 5.40, von Hase declares that:

"Actually Admiral Beatty, by completely outflanking us, in spite of our high speed, accomplished an excellent tactical manœuvre, and his ships carried out an admirable feat of technique. He accomplished the famous 'crossing the T,' compelled us to alter course, and brought us into such a position that we were completely enveloped by the English Battle Fleet and battle cruisers."†

Before night fell, when the opportunity offered, Beatty had again led the battle cruisers into effective range, and had again forced the enemy's van to turn away, although in the meantime he had seen another of his vulnerable vessels blow up.

Admiral Jellicoe paid a warm tribute to Beatty's leadership in his despatch:

"Sir David Beatty once again showed his fine qualities of gallant leadership, firm determination and correct strategic insight. He appreciated the situation at once on

\* "Admiral von Hipper," page 207.

† "Kiel and Jutland," pages 172 and 173.

sighting first the enemy's light forces, then his battle cruisers and finally his Battle Fleet. I can fully sympathise with his feelings when the evening mist and failing light robbed the Fleet of that complete victory for which he had manœuvred and for which the vessels in company with him had striven so hard. The services rendered by him, not only on this but on two previous occasions, have been of the very greatest value.”\*

The fighting spirit of the Battle Cruiser Force compelled the admiration of the whole Fleet, but when I joined it one was continually told, and by the highest authority, that “it was a pity our battle cruisers shot so badly—the German battle cruisers shot infinitely better—practically all the damage sustained by the enemy battle cruisers was inflicted by the Fifth Battle Squadron and the Battle Fleet, etc.,” and this story persisted until a thorough investigation of all the German evidence finally disposed of it.†

There is unimpeachable evidence to prove that our battle cruisers hit the enemy's battle cruisers a great many more times than they were themselves hit. The Gunnery Officer of the *Lützow* records that :

“She was repeatedly hit early in the action and the men were very subdued, but when it was realised that the hits were not affecting the fighting efficiency of the ship much, the men's spirits rose and it was difficult to keep them quiet.”

Despite the poor visibility, the *Seydlitz* was hit twice and the *Derfflinger* once before 4 p.m., when the *Lion* received the hit which destroyed her “Q” turret. The *Lützow* was hit at least

\* “Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's Despatch,” 24th June, 1916. Published in the *London Gazette*, 6th July, 1916.

† The German official records have been recently analysed in a pamphlet “New Light on Jutland,” by the Rev. J. L. R. Pastfield, M.A., who was assisted by Vice-Admiral V. B. Molteno, Captain of the *Warrior* during the Battle of Jutland. Mr. Pastfield has made a careful analysis of every hit recorded on both British and German ships, and has proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, that not only did our battle cruisers hit the Germans far more often than they were themselves hit, but that our armour was superior and our armour-piercing projectiles were more efficient than those of the German.

40 times by heavy projectiles, four times by the Fifth Battle Squadron, and four times by the Second Battle Squadron, the remainder being all made by the battle cruisers. All the German battle cruisers were hit many times by ours; on the other hand the *New Zealand* (Captain J. Green), was only hit once and the *Inflexible* and *Indomitable* did not receive *one single hit* during the battle.

The German Navy may well be proud of their wonderfully constructed ships. Their system of subdivision made their vessels almost unsinkable and limited the effect of mine or torpedo explosion, and the penetration of shells on the water line, to a minimum. Their magazines were well protected against plunging fire and they had arrangements which safeguarded their magazines if they were hit in a turret.\* Their propellant was far safer than our highly inflammable and explosive cordite, which was responsible for the destruction of our ships, when their insufficiently armoured turrets were penetrated. Four British turrets were penetrated and three ships blew up, a fate narrowly averted by the fourth (the *Lion*). Of the more heavily armoured German turrets, nine were penetrated by British shells which exploded inside. In eight cases fires were caused, but no ship was blown up.

Everyone in our Service is ready to give the Germans full credit for being a very brave enemy and for having skilfully extricated themselves from an exceedingly dangerous position, in which they might well have been overwhelmed by our vastly superior forces. But surely they are lacking in a sense of humour when they claim a flight to escape annihilation as a great victory.

\* For this they had to thank the experience they gained in the Dogger Bank action, when the *Seydlitz* was hit in a turret and narrowly escaped being blown up (see Vol. I, page 114).

## CHAPTER V

### SCAPA AND INVERGORDON

Life in the Grand Fleet ; Work and Recreation ; Conference on board *Iron Duke* ; *Centurion* refits at Invergordon ; Eight days' leave ; German sortie ; Grand Fleet goes to sea ; High Sea Fleet again escapes ; *Nottingham* and *Falmouth* torpedoed ; New Naval Policy.

I FOUND life in the Grand Fleet very peaceful and restful, after the strenuous time I had gone through since August, 1914. I had last seen the Fleet in Loch Ewe in September of that year ; at that time it had no reasonably safe harbour, and it zigzagged about at sea as much as possible, seeking rest and fuel as far afield as the west coast of Scotland and the north of Ireland. Now, Scapa Flow was a securely defended base, with every conceivable facility for the maintenance of the Fleet, except a dock for capital ships and cruisers. A well-equipped repair ship, destroyer depot ships, and a number of dockyard workmen, assisted the ships' companies to keep their vessels thoroughly efficient, without having recourse to a dockyard. Docking to clean the ships' bottoms, and examine underwater fittings lasted eight or nine days and was carried out in rotation, at intervals of nine months, in Rosyth Dockyard or in the floating dock at Invergordon ; and was so arranged that the Fleet was never more than one or two ships below full strength at any given moment.

Ships were kept ready to proceed at full speed at four hours' notice. This entailed coaling every three or four days, in order to keep the bunkers at nearly their full capacity.

The "Flow"—as the great space of open water was called—was always occupied by ships and flotillas, both night and day, running torpedoes, carrying out range taking exercises, and gunnery practices with primary sub-calibre and secondary armaments at towed targets ; the Flow being allocated to ships and squadrons in turn.

Two entrances to Scapa Flow had been made submarine proof with heavy anti-submarine nets suspended between numbers of moored trawlers, these were defended against destroyer attack by shore batteries of quick-firing guns, and the approaches to them through the Pentland Firth were swept daily by a wonderfully efficient sweeping force. The northern and eastern entrances were blocked by sunken ships.

The ships with their war complements were very crowded, but the health of the crews was excellent. I wrote a few days after I joined: "The absence of sickness in this ship is remarkable, two men scalded, two with sprained ankles, one in a hospital ship with appendicitis. It is the same throughout the Fleet, and there seem to be no defaulters and no punishments—at any rate in this ship. Everyone is full of enthusiasm and the spirit is excellent. One hears many tales of the fighting at Jutland—here is one. A destroyer was seen lying disabled in a sinking condition, exuding flames, smoke and steam; when the Battle Fleet steamed by into action, the few survivors on the upper deck of the destroyer cheered each ship as she passed."

A few days after I joined the *Centurion*, Sir John Jellicoe arrived and summoned all the Flag Officers and Captains to a meeting on board the *Iron Duke*. I had not seen him since my visit to Loch Ewe, I thought he looked tired and harassed, which was not surprising after all he had gone through, and the great responsibilities he had to bear.

Sir John told us how greatly superior the German ships were to ours, which were very vulnerable to plunging fire and the decks above the magazines must be protected with extra armour. Extempore arrangements must be made at once to prevent the flash of cordite charges, set alight by the explosion of a shell in a turret, from reaching the magazine; as it was certain that one of the battle cruisers had been blown up from this cause and the *Lion* had narrowly escaped the same fate. The speed of the Third German Battle Squadron was as high as that of the Fifth Battle Squadron, which was a great disappointment, as the latter were credited with nearly three knots greater speed.\* Their organisation for night fighting was wonderful. Their star-shells—of which we previously knew

\* This was a misconception, due to the action on the afternoon of 31st May, between these two squadrons being fought on converging courses.

nothing—enabled them to locate destroyers without illuminating their own ships. Not only were the German searchlights much better than ours, but their control arrangements for using guns and searchlights simultaneously were far superior to anything we possessed. Our armour-piercing projectiles and our fuses were greatly inferior to the enemy's.\* The German smoke-screens were wonderful, we must learn to develop and use them in the same way.

I sat next to a Captain of the Second Battle Squadron, with whom I had already discussed the battle at great length, and we came away rather depressed at this sad recital. I have already mentioned the inferiority of our mines and the difficulty our submarines experienced in hitting their targets, owing to the warheads of their torpedoes being too heavy. We "Salthorse" sailors agreed that we had good reason to feel resentful at the way we had been let down by our materialists, to whom we had looked confidently to provide us with the very best of everything, and I think naval students may be tempted to look in the Navy Lists of the years preceding the War for the names of those on whom the responsibility must always rest.

With characteristic energy and administrative skill, the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff organised a programme for taking in hand all the capital ships, and completing the necessary alterations and additions with the least possible delay, while keeping the ships in an immediate state of readiness for action.

While armoured plating was being prepared, to be riveted on to the roofs of the turrets, and the decks above the shell rooms and magazines; and new doors were being made for the latter, extempore arrangements were fitted to drench cordite fires, fit asbestos screens and fearnought curtains, etc., to lessen the effect of a heavy shell entering a turret, and prevent the flash reaching the magazine. But it was some months before the *Centurion* was properly fitted to withstand the kind of blow, which so nearly blew up the *Lion* and accounted for three battle cruisers.

I took the first opportunity of spending a night in the Flow, to test the *Centurion's* night action stations, and found them as ineffective as the Commander-in-Chief had indicated. It was a long time before the *Centurion's* turn came to be fitted

\* See Footnote, page 66.

with a new searchlight control, but in the meantime, by dint of practising with a destroyer night after night, in fact whenever I could get the Flow allocated to me, a great improvement was effected in her night defence against torpedo attack.

Gunnery battle practice and fire concentration was carried out by squadrons and divisions in the Pentland Firth against towed targets, elaborate arrangements being made to protect our ships from submarine attack.

The Fleet periodically went to sea for exercises, and the Battle Cruiser Force from the south and the battle squadron resting at Invergordon met at a prearranged rendezvous, and carried out tactical exercises all day. As night fell, the Fleet scattered in divisions and squadrons on prearranged courses, reforming at dawn; the procedure was admirable and everything worked like clockwork.

This routine went on summer and winter, and on the darkest and foulest night, the six divisions of the Battle Fleet would go out through the narrow gate in the net defence into the racing tideway of the Pentland Firth, where their destroyer screens and the cruiser squadrons, emerging from the other entrance, would pick them up with skilful precision.

Sir John Jellicoe and his Chief of Staff had certainly evolved a wonderful organisation, the machinery of which ran smoothly and efficiently.

It is very important in wartime to keep mind and body fit to meet any call that may be made upon it, and I made a point of sailing ashore in my galley almost every day, in all sorts of weather, and walking for miles—generally accompanied by one of my friends—on one or other of the islands overlooking the anchorage. When the Fleet was at four hours' notice, we had ample time to get on board if a signal of recall was made.

It was very noticeable that during the battle, some people survived long immersion, and were picked up among numbers of their comrades who had succumbed to the same exposure. I therefore tried to harden myself by having a cold bath every morning.

The life of a Captain is a lonely one, and I had any amount of leisure to read, so I occupied my evenings in studying naval and military history, which I have always found of absorbing interest. The same lesson runs down the ages, admirably



expressed in two sayings of Frederick the Great, which I wrote down in my staff notebook on 16th December, 1915, a few days after the evacuation of Anzac and Helles: "To strive always for the highest possible success, with the utmost energy, is the first principle of all warfare." And "Attack alone achieves positive results, mere defence always supplies but negative results. The maximum possible success is by itself therefore attainable only through the offensive, and the results of the offensive are increased by boldness." This summed up my belief then and now.

We did everything we could to interest the men and keep them fit. There were a number of football grounds on shore; football matches, sailing and pulling races, and boxing competitions between individual ships and squadrons were frequent. Most ships had a concert or theatrical party, and a cinema. I well remember one film in serial form, which went on week after week in the *Centurion* and was described as "Thousands of Feet of Love and Drama," the actors did fearfully dangerous things, including the very pretty heroine, to whom the whole ship's company lost their hearts. Her lover the hero—who was also very popular—disappeared out of the story (killed we were told in the production of the film) so her affections were transferred to another actor. This was very unpopular, and the first close-up of her with her new lover was loudly booed, and the men took no further interest in the fickle lady.

Early in August the *Centurion* was due for her periodical docking and refit, which was to be carried out at Invergordon. During these refits practically the whole ship's company was sent on leave, a few officers and about 50 men being left to look after the ship while she was in dockyard hands. This party was sent on advanced leave and came back a few days before we sailed on the 6th August.

Much to my disappointment, we missed the Battle Cruiser Force, which arrived in the Flow as we were leaving it. Some of the ships showed signs of the battle, including the *Lion*, which was still short of her new "Q" turret. This was the first meeting between the battleships and battle cruisers since the Battle of Jutland, and we cheered each ship as we passed,

and this was taken up by the rest of the Grand Fleet as the battle cruisers steamed to their anchorage.

The *Centurion* then passed through the gate, the band playing "Rolling Home to Merry England" and we zigzagged down to Invergordon, screened by two destroyers.

In the meantime my wife had taken Udale House on the Cromarty side of the anchorage, above the oddly named village of Jemimaville. She had given up our Fareham house, sold the cows and pigs, and transferred herself, three children, seven servants, two dozen chickens, two prams and about two tons of luggage there, a day or two before the *Centurion* arrived. No mean feat in wartime, and I was much chaffed by the Director of Mobilization, who happened to have travelled on the same train. He had reserved two third-class carriages for her large party, there being no other accommodation available, and looking in said he had found her with one child asleep in the luggage rack, and another slung in a hammock between them. They had quite an adventurous journey, as there was a Zeppelin raid that night and the train stood still with all lights out somewhere in Yorkshire for two or three hours, with the result that they did not arrive at Fortrose until 2 p.m. instead of 11 a.m. As this was the only time the pubs were open, the men who had come to meet her party with a bus and farm cart, had been making the most of their long wait, and were anything but sober. However, leaving the children and nurses at the hotel for a meal, she and the other servants started off in the bus for their eight-mile drive. My wife went on the box beside the driver, who drove off with a flourish down the steep hill and round two right angle corners, without attempting to put his brakes on, so that the bus rocked from side to side and nearly took the horses off their legs. After that the driver dropped off to sleep, so my wife tried to take the reins, but he then became quarrelsome, so all she could do was to talk to him, to try and keep him awake. Fortunately the horses knew their way home and they arrived safely, and she managed to get a car to fetch the children home afterwards.

By the time I arrived, she had made the house fairly comfortable, and after seeing the ship docked and the men off on leave, I went ashore for eight days, during which my wife and

I went off to her old home at Knoydart, on the west coast, for three days, via Dingwall and Kyle, where my brother-in-law met us in a small yacht and took us down to Loch Nevis, which is only accessible by sea. It was very bright and sunny and the river was very low, but my wife—who had fished since she was a child and knew every stone in it—killed three salmon, and we each got a number of sea-trout. It was a delightful holiday and the first real leave I had had since the War began.

Among the officers of the *Centurion* there were four who were very keen about shooting, the Commander, Wilfred French, Godsal, the First Lieutenant, and two young Lieutenants, Victor Crutchley and Oliver Fitzroy. They had discovered that Sir Ronald Munro-Fergusson, then Governor-General of Australia, had turned his house at Novar into an hotel, in which several naval officers' wives lived, and allowed naval officers to shoot his grouse moor at two guineas per gun a day. He provided keepers and dogs, and each gun was allowed a brace of grouse. A day or two after I got back, I went out with two of the officers and we shot about 30 brace of grouse. This was quite easy to arrange when one's ship was out of action, but took a good deal of organisation when the Fleet was at four hours' notice, in order to make certain that one could be found and get back in time, if the ship was ordered to sea.

On 18th August, the day before the *Centurion* was due to be undocked, it was clear from intercepted wireless signals, that a concentration was taking place in the North Sea, probably to meet a German sortie. The *Minotaur*, *Monarch*, and *Benbow*, the only other ships at Invergordon, sailed at about 6 p.m. for a rendezvous which had been given to them. I arranged with the Admiral of the Dockyard to undock the *Centurion* as soon as possible, and gave orders to raise steam for full speed with all dispatch. We were ready about midnight and I would have sailed at once, but I had no information as to where to meet the Fleet. I signalled repeatedly, informing the Commander-in-Chief that I was ready to proceed at full speed and asked for a rendezvous. But there was a deadly silence in the North Sea, and my signals remained unanswered until midnight, when I received a curt answer to be silent. I found the situation simply intolerable, there was nothing to be done but to put

steam back to normal, and request the Dockyard to complete the interrupted refit.

On the morning of the 19th, I hired an old car, and with French, Godsall and Crutchley went off to shoot at Novar, in the hope that that would distract our minds from what was going on in the North Sea. I spent a miserable unhappy day, although we shot 42½ brace of grouse.

When I next met the Commander-in-Chief, he told me he appreciated my anxiety to join the Fleet, and was very sorry to have to leave me in harbour, but in view of the presence of enemy submarines, he could not let the *Centurion* go to sea without a destroyer escort, and he had no destroyers to spare. Sir John had been a very good friend to me since the China War, in which I was always lucky enough to be in the right place at the right moment, and so I told him he could not expect to have good luck if he left me behind.

We know now that Admiral Scheer had intended to bombard Sunderland. He left the old pre-dreadnought battleships behind, and was short of the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz*, which were still under repair, but had been reinforced by the new battleship *Bayern*, mounting eight 15-inch guns—the answer to our “Queen Elizabeths.” He thus had 17 battleships and two battle cruisers.

There can be no doubt that Scheer hoped to carry out his attack on the British coast and escape before the Grand Fleet could cut him off, for eight Zeppelins scouted for him, and 24 submarines were stationed in five lines across the most probable routes of the British approach (*see plan*).

Thanks to intercepted signals, the Admiralty knew during the forenoon of 18th August that the High Sea Fleet was going to sea, and that there was a considerable concentration of German submarines in the North Sea. They took prompt action, and the whole British Fleet, including Tyrwhitt's cruisers and destroyers and a number of submarines, sailed from Scapa Flow, Invergordon, Rosyth, Blyth, Immingham and Harwich. The Grand Fleet ships actually sailed before Scheer left his anchorage at 9 p.m. on 18th August.

The battleships, battle cruisers and cruiser squadrons, were to concentrate on the Long Forties, east of Aberdeen. Tyrwhitt's

Force—five light cruisers and 18 destroyers—was to be on the look-out at Brown Ridge at daybreak, and the submarines were to cover various other places. The only British capital ships left in harbour were the *Centurion*, and the *Indomitable* refitting at Rosyth.

The Commander-in-Chief was at Dundee, with the light cruiser *Royalist* standing by at short notice, to take him to the Fleet should he be required. The *Iron Duke*, which was about 12 miles ahead of the Battle Fleet, and was actually closing the *Royalist*, and about to stop at about 8 p.m. to pick up Sir John, when it was reported that a German submarine had narrowly missed torpedoing one of the destroyers escorting the *Iron Duke*. So the ships ran some miles farther to the south before Sir John transferred to the *Iron Duke* and took command of the Fleet. The submarine only fired one torpedo and apparently made no report to Scheer, who does not mention the incident. It seems possible that there was no submarine there, as the position was nowhere near the enemy's submarine lines, and scores of cases occurred on both sides of reported submarine attacks when no submarines existed. Whether an attack was delivered or not, it was very unfortunate, for it naturally added to Sir John's anxieties.

Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, who was in command of the Grand Fleet during Sir John Jellicoe's absence, did not feel justified in taking the Fleet to the Long Forties, while the enemy's intentions were obscure, and had ordered the Battle Squadrons to rendezvous at 5 a.m., 100 miles to the eastward of the Firth of Forth, and the Battle Cruiser Force 30 miles to the southward at the same hour (*see plan*).

By daylight all the detached squadrons had converged and had taken up their cruising stations. The visibility was not very good, and at 6 a.m. Admiral Jellicoe ordered the battle cruisers to drop back and keep within signalling distance of his advanced cruiser line.

The whole Fleet was steaming to the southward, when at 6 a.m. the *Nottingham*—in the cruiser screen ahead of the battle cruisers—was struck by two torpedoes fired by a German submarine, which delivered a skilful attack, and remaining in the neighbourhood, attempted to torpedo the *Dublin* and two destroyers which went to her aid. Half an hour later the

submarine hit the *Nottingham* with a third torpedo and she sank at 7.10 a.m.

The Commander-in-Chief did not hear of the *Nottingham's* misfortune until about 7 a.m., and did not know until later whether she had been actually mined or torpedoed, so fearing that: "He would walk into the trap which he had long expected the enemy to lay for him; he turned the whole Fleet to the northward at 7 o'clock."\*

Thus once again the enemy were fortunate enough to torpedo one of Sir John Jellicoe's ships at a most critical moment of the proceedings.

Shortly before Admiral Jellicoe turned to the northward at 7 a.m., he learnt from the Admiralty that directional wireless had placed the German Battle Fleet at 5.25 a.m. in Lat. 54.19 N., Long. 4.48 E., and at 9 a.m. they informed him that a German battleship had been torpedoed by a British submarine in Lat. 54.15 N., Long. 4.45 E.

On receipt of the latter signal, Admiral Jellicoe turned again to the southward, and having lost four hours, had once again to face the submarine risks from which he had retreated. This time he was well clear of the submarine lines.

Meanwhile Scheer was making for Sunderland, undeterred by the loss of the battleship *Westfalen* (the battleship referred to above), which was torpedoed by *E23* (Lieut.-Commander R. R. Turner) at 5 a.m. She was not very badly injured, but Scheer considered it advisable to send her home.

Soon after 8 a.m. he knew from the reports of a submarine and a Zeppelin, that British battleships to the northward of him, were steering a northerly course. Tyrwhitt's force, which was patrolling to and fro on Brown's Ridge, happened to be on a south-westerly course, when sighted and reported to Scheer by another Zeppelin at about the same time, he was thus encouraged to continue his course towards Sunderland, since both British forces were steering away from one another and from him.

Scheer tells us that at 12.30 (when he would have been in contact with the Grand Fleet but for the latter's turn to the north) a Zeppelin reported strong enemy forces to the southward, consisting of 16 destroyers, several small and large cruisers

\* "Official History of the War. Naval Operations," Vol. IV, page 36.

and battleships steering N. by E., and he decided to advance against them.\* Presumably Scheer was under the impression that the battleships were the Third Battle Squadron (the *Dreadnought* and eight pre-dreadnought "King Edwards") which no doubt, he knew were stationed in the Thames estuary. This force was Tyrwhitt's five light cruisers and 18 destroyers; he had intercepted a British submarine's report to the effect that a strong German force was to the northward, and he was going north to investigate, but not sighting anything, he went back to his station.

At 2.35, Scheer received information from one of his submarines that strong British forces were about 65 miles to the northward of him at 1.15 p.m. steering south. He then decided that it was too late to bombard Sunderland, and he made for home with all dispatch.

Meanwhile the Grand Fleet was coming south, and it seems that Sir John Jellicoe imagined that action would be joined with the High Sea Fleet soon after 2 p.m., but by that time the High Sea Fleet was many miles to the eastward of him on a south-easterly course, and once again his opportunity had passed.

Sir John records that :

"It seemed fairly certain to me that the enemy would leave a trap behind him in the shape of mines or submarines or both; and indeed the numerous submarines already sighted made it probable that the trap was extensive; it was therefore unwise to pass over the waters which he had occupied unless there was a prospect of bringing the High Sea Fleet to action.

It was clear that if no enemy vessels were in sight by 4 p.m. and if he had turned for home, it would be impossible to bring him to action. At 3.20 p.m., however, the Rear-Admiral commanding the Third Light Cruiser Squadron reported a submarine in sight, and I signalled to Sir David Beatty to turn at once, as it seemed that my supposition as to the submarines was correct."<sup>†</sup>

At 3.40 Admiral Jellicoe received the enemy's position by directional wireless from the Admiralty, and he knew that

\* "Germany's High Sea Fleet," page 182.

† "The Grand Fleet, 1914-1916," page 443.

Scheer was returning to his base, so he proceeded on his way home. The accompanying plan shows how very unfortunate the battle cruisers' screen was to run into the German submarine line 1. With a little luck it might well have missed it, and the Grand Fleet would have then continued to the southward, with every prospect of meeting the enemy.

The Official Naval Historian declares however that: "It is important that the consequences of this movement should not be exaggerated. Had it never been made, that is, had Admiral Jellicoe pressed on to the southward, his advance forces might have been in contact with Hipper's squadron between 12 and 1 p.m." And he goes on to say that it was in the last degree improbable that the German Commander-in-Chief could have known nothing of the whereabouts of the Grand Fleet, until it was close upon him. That may be so, but on the other hand it was very unfortunate that a Zeppelin should have mistakenly reported that Tyrwhitt's force contained battleships, otherwise Scheer might well have pressed on towards Sunderland until the Grand Fleet was between him and his base, despite the four wasted hours. Reference to the plan will show what a narrow escape Scheer had, and it illustrates the lessons of this most disappointing affair.

It certainly was not one of our lucky days, once again a little luck would have taken the Grand Fleet on its homeward journey clear of the German submarine line 1, but it passed through the eastern edge. The whole great Fleet got through unscathed, but an alarming number of submarine reports reached Sir John Jellicoe, and the *Inflexible* reported that two torpedoes had missed her astern.

Unfortunately the outer submarine of line 3 sighted our Battle Cruiser Force as it went south and moved out into its track. When the Fleet turned to the northward, the submarine succeeded in torpedoing the *Falmouth* about 5 p.m. She nearly reached home, but unfortunately the next morning she encountered another submarine of line 3 and was torpedoed again. Eventually she sank, eight hours after the fourth torpedo struck her, within five miles of the shore.

The Official Historian tells us that this day made a very strong impression on Sir John: "To Admiral Jellicoe it appeared as though the enemy had perfected the game which he had so



long expected them to play. He was persuaded that Admiral Scheer's operation had been designed to draw the Fleet over submarines, and that unless we could protect our light cruisers with destroyer screens, we should suffer heavy losses by striving to bring the enemy to action whenever he left harbour." He thought our policy of invariably moving our forces whenever the German High Sea Fleet went to sea, "needed drastic revision." He could no longer undertake, "without an adequate destroyer screen, to guarantee coastal towns against bombardment, or to interfere with the early stages of a landing" and he strongly urged that the plan of disregarding the mine and submarine menace, and "seeking the enemy in any locality, whenever he was known to be at sea was no longer tenable."

It had long been realised that the Grand Fleet could not be in time to interfere seriously with the opening stages of a raid in force, as long as it was based at Scapa Flow, and strenuous efforts were being made by the Admiralty to complete the anti-submarine defence of the Firth of Forth, so as to enable the whole Grand Fleet to make it their base if Admiral Jellicoe wished to do so. However: "Admiral Jellicoe made it quite clear that his proposals were independent of whether the Fleet was based at Rosyth or Scapa; and that only if he could be given more destroyers would he be willing to reconsider his decision."\*

The Admiralty had no choice but to supersede Sir John Jellicoe or fall in with his views, and so new orders were issued to the Grand Fleet, which were put into practice the next time the High Sea Fleet went to sea.

On the 18th October the Admiralty got wind of a German sortie, and learnt by directional wireless of the presence of German submarines off the coast and the Long Forties. The High Sea Fleet sailed that night and made for the middle of the North Sea. Scheer does not tell us what he intended to do, but he happened to run into one of our submarines, which missed the *Moltke* but torpedoed the cruiser *München*. The German Fleet returned to harbour the night of the 19th and Scheer announced that it could find no enemy.

The Admiralty had adhered to the new policy. The Grand Fleet remained in its harbours at short notice, and: "the burden

\* "Naval Operations," Vol. IV, pages 47 to 49.

of resisting the impending raid was thrown entirely upon the local defence forces." The Naval Historian describes the situation: "A deadlock had thus been reached and it seemed for the future two great battle fleets could but lie inactive, watching one another across a sort of "No-man's Sea."\*

One cannot blame Scheer for not daring to risk a gunnery encounter against such odds, but it was not a very heroic proceeding on our part, in view of our immense superiority in ships of every class.

These were the first and last sorties of the High Sea Fleet during my service in the Grand Fleet.

The North Sea looks small on the largest scale chart, but when one is on it, it seems a vast expanse of water, in which the danger zone of a submarine is infinitesimally small. By the nature of their work, submarines must operate some distance apart, and on the 19th August, we know that they were at such a distance apart on the five German submarine lines, as to make it impossible for more than one submarine to attack the Fleet proceeding through it at high speed. Moreover, judging by our experience, the odds against a well-screened battleship or battle cruiser being hit by a submarine's torpedo were enormous. In the whole course of the War, the only British battleship struck by a submarine's torpedo in Home Waters was the old pre-dreadnought *Formidable*, which was torpedoed in the Channel on a bright moonlight night by a submarine working on the surface.

The effect of a torpedo on a modern capital ship had been proved to be limited, as the *Marlborough's* experience had shown, and yet the whole conduct of the naval war in the North Sea was dictated by the *fear* of torpedoes.

In the early days of the War, the excessive rashness of the ships in the North Sea, including those of the Grand Fleet, and their failure to take ordinary precautions against submarines, which peace exercises had proved necessary, filled me with anxiety.

In the Gallipoli Campaign, the *fear* of mines—which could be swept; the *fear* of concealed torpedo tubes—which did not exist; and the *fear* of concealed howitzers—which had proved to be a greatly exaggerated menace, had prevented our obsolete

\* "Naval Operations," Vol. IV, pages 47 to 49.

battleships winning imperishable fame and achieving a great victory.

Then when the War had been dragging on for two years, and England sorely needed a naval victory (without which Lord Fisher's Baltic project was unthinkable)—an exaggerated fear of torpedoes and submarines overwhelmed every military consideration, and I found it difficult to control my resentful impatience.

## CHAPTER VI

### MORE SCAPA AND INVERGORDON

Grouse shooting ; Paravanes ; Commander injured ; Flag changes ; Sir David Beatty succeeds Sir John Jellicoe ; Submarine Committee reports ; Letter to Everett ; Promoted Rear-Admiral ; *Centurion* docks at Invergordon ; Attend Dardanelles Commission.

AFTER the German sortie in August, the Second Battle Squadron came to Invergordon, and so the *Centurion* had a good spell there, which was very pleasant, and sometimes it was difficult to believe that we were at war.

We had half a dozen delightful days shooting over dogs on the Novar moors. These shoots whetted our appetites for more, and my young officers, who had been making inquiries about the shooting on the islands surrounding Scapa Flow, had found that we could rent the Hobister Moor on the northern shore for £50 with a limit of 75 brace of grouse, so we took it.

We returned to Scapa on the 18th September, and two days later we sailed with the whole Fleet for one of our periodical cruises in the North Sea. We landed to shoot at the earliest opportunity after our return, but found the birds very wild, and before long had to drive them. There were any amount of volunteer beaters among the midshipmen and lower deck, and we always took a signalman to watch the ship ; he was provided with materials to make a smoky fire, which was the signal for recall ; at Scapa there was never the slightest risk of not returning in good time, when the ships were at four hours' notice.

Throughout the winter we shot snipe and woodcock, which came in in frosty weather, and our bag for the 1916 season was about 300 head, including 75 brace of grouse.

The carpenter of the *Centurion* was a regular old poacher, so we allowed him to shoot ground game on the moor adjoining the foreshore ; he wandered about with an old gun and some

ferrets, generally accompanied by the Fleet Paymaster or a Midshipman, and they killed a good many rabbits and rats.

Those days at Scapa will always be a happy memory, and it was a wonderfully restful and healthy life.

In October the Commander-in-Chief appointed me to preside over a small committee of three, the other members being Captain Candy and Commander Little—ex-submarine captains—to make suggestions on submarine subjects, and report on important questions relating to the employment of submarines.

I sent a copy of the Mediterranean memorandum on submarines to the *Iron Duke*, as it contained a good deal of information which was not generally understood in the Fleet. The first problem put to us was to propose counter-measures to the activity of enemy submarines, operating against our trade on the American coast. *U53* had held up several vessels off New York and had destroyed them, mostly by explosive charges or gunfire. We gave our views very fully, and reiterated those I had expressed so often before.

I had not been long in the Grand Fleet before I received a summons to London to give evidence before the Dardanelles Commission. I hated the very thought of the Dardanelles—apart from the risk of being away from the *Centurion* if the Fleet was ordered to sea—so I begged Admiral Jerram to ask the Commander-in-Chief to say that I could not be spared, and the latter very kindly telegraphed: "I think it is very important that Captain Keyes should be in the *Centurion* when we meet the enemy, which may be any day."

We remained at Scapa for about two months, during which we exercised in the Flow, fired in the Pentland Firth and went to sea for cruises. For recreation, besides our shoot, I sailed my galley, generally against one or two of my friends, and took part in the weekly races and regattas.

The Second Battle Squadron's turn for a spell at Invergordon came again in November, but it was never known when a fleet or a squadron would sail, until a few hours before its actual departure. I had bought a little Shetland pony at Kirkwall for my children and embarked her when I thought we were about to sail for Invergordon; but we did not go for eight days, so Firebrace—the Gunnery Lieut.-Commander—gave her an action station in the after shell-room; she never actually went

to it, but I was assured that if firing took place there would be no difficulty in lowering her down the hoist, and the shell-room would be the quietest place in the ship. Having been to sea in the Grand Fleet, the qualification for the War medals she wore the ribbons on her browband for many years after the War.

For some time experiments had been taking place with two devices to protect ships from mines, one invented by Commander Usborne and the other an improvement by Lieutenant D. Burney. The former was cheaper and easier to produce, but the latter being more suitable for high speed, was adopted in H.M. ships. It consisted of two torpedo-shaped paravanes, which were towed from the stem of a ship; they steered themselves out on either bow, and maintained a set depth. If a mine was encountered at a depth which would strike the ship, the mooring slid down the towing wire and was cut by a cutter in the nose of the paravane, and the mine then came to the surface well clear of the ship.

We tried ours for the first time at sea on the way to Invergordon on the 13th November. Paravanes as first fitted were difficult to handle, and the immense strain on the towing arrangements at high speed was not properly appreciated. Soon after we left the Pentland Firth and were steaming at 18 knots, the towing wire of the port paravane parted, and Commander French, who was watching them from the forecastle, was struck by the end of the wire as it flew forward and suffered a very severe compound fracture of one leg. While he was lying on the deck waiting for a stretcher, I went down from the bridge and was sympathising with him, when there was an ominous crack, and one of the links parted of the cable to which the end of the starboard towing wire was secured. Fortunately, by that time every one was well aft, and French and I were the only two people between it and the fairlead forward, through which the wire was rushing out at a tremendous speed, the end with three or four links of cable flicking from side to side like a whip lash. French rolled over and over in an effort to get out of its reach. I was afraid he would be jerked overboard if it hit him, as we were cleared for action, and there was nothing to stop him, so I bent over him and was holding him when the wire curled round my legs and the chain hit him with a

sickening thud, breaking his arm without hurting me. He was a very sick man and a cripple for many months, and the *Centurion* lost an excellent and most popular Commander. He went to a hospital ship on our arrival at Invergordon, and was succeeded by Commander Gerard Wells, whom I had known since he was a small boy at the Cape of Good Hope, when I was a midshipman in his father's flagship, the *Raleigh*.

We decided to have another shoot at Novar, but the grouse were now of course too wild to shoot over dogs, and the head keeper arranged a grouse drive on some moors a good distance away. We took out a large party of volunteer naval beaters in a charabanc, and stationed signalmen on two hills, one in sight of the ship and the other overlooking the moor. The ship made "O.K." at intervals by searchlight and the signal was passed on by semaphore to the next hill. I must confess my enjoyment of the shoot was tempered by anxiety lest our careful arrangements for recall, or our motor cars, broke down, and personally I always felt relieved when we got back on board from the Novar shoots.

Towards the end of the month of November, we heard that the Commander-in-Chief was giving up the Command and going to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord, and that other flag changes were probable. I was on tenterhooks, so much depended on the new appointments. On the 28th November we heard that Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, with the acting rank of Admiral. Several other changes were made, but the one which interested me most was Admiral de Robeck's appointment to command the Second Battle Squadron. All my old friends on his Staff, except Godfrey, who was still in the Mediterranean, accompanied him to the *King George V*.

We left for Scapa on the 9th December, and on the 19th our new Commander-in-Chief took the Fleet to sea. We had very rough weather, and one foul night during which the destroyers *Hoste* and *Negro* collided, and both sank with the loss of 55 lives. The majority of the ship's company of the *Hoste* were saved by the destroyer *Marvel*, which was handled with the greatest skill and determination by Commander E. A. Homan, in spite of pitch darkness and a driving gale.

Soon after he took command, Admiral Beatty directed my Submarine Committee to report on the desirability of organising submarine flotillas, with a view to their employment more offensively than they were at that time, particularly in regard to undertaking offensive measures against enemy submarines. He pointed out that six flotillas were reserved for purposes of defence only. Their suitability for more active employment should be considered.

I had taken every opportunity of keeping in touch with the submarine captains who worked from, or visited, Scapa, among whom were some of my splendid pioneers in new "J" and "K" class submarines. They often brought their vessels alongside the *Centurion* for the night, and I gave the captains a hot bath and dinner, and the officers and ships' company entertained their crews, generally with a cinema entertainment to end up.

It was intensely interesting to see how wonderfully Johns—our Constructor—had worked out the new designs and to hear all the latest submarine news. I generally got Little and Candy to meet them, and we reviewed the whole submarine question, with the object of arriving at a policy which would meet the existing naval situation, and we all came to the conclusion that a great many of our submarines were not being fully or wisely employed.

As the War had proceeded, mines, nets, depth charges and other anti-submarine devices, made the blockade of enemy ports exceedingly difficult and dangerous; the threat of being stalked by enemy submarines, assisted probably by aerial reconnaissance, had imposed continuous diving on our patrols, which were gradually withdrawn from the Heligoland Bight. Nevertheless many of our submarines were still maintained in positions in which they were subjected to risks, and suffered losses, out of all proportion to the military results it was possible for them to attain, under the new conditions. On the other hand, the inactivity imposed on a large number of our smaller submarines was having a disheartening effect on their crews.

We fully realised that our submarines could not be expected to inflict serious losses on the enemy's submarines; opportunities for attack would become increasingly rare, if the enemy was forced to remain submerged through the fear of our submarines, decoy ships, and the guns of our merchantmen. We



recommended, however, that every submarine not actually required for service with the Grand Fleet, or the protection of coast towns, should be employed on the trade routes, in the vicinity of fishing fleets, and generally speaking in areas in which the enemy submarines were so active, and through which they passed proceeding to and from their ports. Their presence would add enormously to the anxieties and difficulties of the enemy and would limit his vision to the range of his periscope, and his attacks to his torpedoes.

It might be said that it would be a waste of effort for submarines to hunt submarines, but in the absence of more profitable employment, we considered that they could not be better engaged than in assisting to protect our trade and fishing fleets in the manner suggested. After enforced inactivity, or a long spell of dangerous and fruitless employment without surface targets, there could be no doubt that our submarine captains would welcome the opportunity of hunting their opposite numbers in the open sea, clear of the minefields which had taken such heavy toll of their comrades, without the attainment of commensurate results. We strongly urged that they should be employed on this service, which would give a far better field for enterprise and initiative than the futile diving patrols now maintained in the North Sea.

Apart from this recommendation, Commander Little drew up a memorandum, which was forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief, outlining a scheme by which the present convoy system, adopted by the Grand Fleet from Bergen to Immingham via Lerwick, should be expanded into a general scheme of convoy, embracing all our oversea trade.

In December I was again summoned to attend the Dardanelles Commission, but to my great relief Sir David Beatty declined to let me go. I then received a letter from the Secretary of the Commission, requesting me to forward "A statement of my views upon the whole Dardanelles Campaign." I replied that my connection with the Campaign had extended over 11 months, during which I was personally concerned—as Chief of the Staff to three successive Admirals—with every operation which took place, and I asked that I might be informed as to the principal points upon which the Commission required my views. I received no suggestion other than that it was thought I could

compress my views upon the matter within six pages of foolscap typewriting. I therefore confined my remarks mainly to questions of policy, which in most cases could be substantiated by reference to telegrams which passed between my Admirals and the Admiralty, and I left the Commission in no doubt as to my opinions as to our failure to renew the naval attack, and on the folly of abandoning the Campaign.\*

I showed my statement to Admiral de Robeck before forwarding it; he was as charming about it as ever, and said that although he thought I was wrong, I had every right to express my own opinions. I hoped that that was the last I should hear of the Dardanelles Commission.

Rumours continually reached me about this time, from two or three different sources, that I was to relieve Admiral Bacon at Dover. I thought it was quite out of the question, and in any case hated the idea of leaving the Grand Fleet. I wrote on the 8th January, 1917: "I don't want to go—much as I should like to have a go at Zeebrugge—it would mean, that except for such an enterprise, I would probably not go to sea again during the War, and my only wish is to stay in the Grand Fleet in some capacity until we have our hour in the North Sea, which we will have under David Beatty before the end."

We had hoped that the Second Battle Squadron would go to Invergordon in February, but Admiral Beatty did not like the dispersion of the battle squadrons and was determined to concentrate the whole Fleet at Rosyth, as soon as the Firth of Forth could be made submarine proof.

On hearing this, my wife went down to Rosyth to look for a house, and succeeded in taking Whitehill, near Aberdour, and moved down there in March, after a very lonely, cold winter with the children at Udale. She moved with a Ford car and a Shetland pony added to the paraphernalia of her last trek. Unfortunately this time the train was snowbound for some hours, so they only got as far as Perth, where they had to spend the night and continue their journey next day.

During that hard winter at Scapa, with its short daylight hours, it was sometimes rather an effort to face bitter winds and sleet and plod through snow for exercise, but I did not miss landing on many days. My companions included de Robeck,

\* See Vol. I.

Goodenough (Second-in-Command, Second Battle Squadron), Fergusson (Captain of the *Thunderer*) very often, Bowlby and Lambart. The latter and I always talked about the Dardanelles and its lost opportunities, and we both felt that the Straits would have to be forced before the end of the War.

After one of our walks, I spent half the night writing to my friend Commodore Everett, who had been a great ally before the War, when he was Captain of the Fleet to Sir George Callaghan. He was now Naval Secretary to the First Sea Lord and in a position to get ideas considered in the right quarter. After giving a brief history of the Campaign and the reasons for its failure, I concluded :

“ The Commission do not appear to have been told why we failed on 18th March, and why the Admiral changed his mind on 23rd March\*—which is just as well, since it is an accepted fact that the opening of the Straits, and keeping them open, by naval action alone is an impossible operation. Heaven forbid another landing ! I say with the greatest confidence that it is a feasible operation, that our experience on 25th February, 7th March and 18th March absolutely proved it ; and I am conceited enough to feel that no one is better qualified to judge than I am ! If we are going to make good our Government’s brave words and fight until we can impose the peace terms we have announced, we will *have* to take a fleet to Constantinople, and we ought to be prepared to do so directly our work in the North Sea is completed. I quite realise that we must have our day with the High Sea Fleet first, but for Heaven’s sake let us be prepared for the other operation with an accepted plan. It will take some time to get ready. The whole world is quite certain that we can’t possibly be so foolish as to undertake any such operation. It is simply a gift—and paravanes and other appliances will reduce our losses to a minimum ; and it *can’t* fail if undertaken by an Admiral who is prepared to face responsibility and loss. Sir Rosie Wemyss was ‘ for it ’ from A to Z, and his gallant effort—by telegram in November–December, 1915—gives him, I think, first claim for the command.

\* I told them in May, 1917. See Vol. I, page 273.

I would be proud to serve under him in any capacity and could select a number of officers for various duties, whose ardent spirit would ensure success. Do please be interested, and do what you can to get this project favourably considered. Carried out at a moment which I feel sure will arrive, it would put a definite and final stopper on the Germans' Eastern Campaign, incidentally wipe out our disastrous failure and raise our prestige enormously all over the world. In what other way can we and our Allies make good our bold declaration? Certainly not via Salonika—as I once told Sarraïl. Our object would have to be kept secret if we are to do it without *any* loss. (I am afraid the ardent spirits spoiling for a desperate fight will be awfully disappointed!!), but it could be allowed to leak out that the expedition is being prepared for the Baltic—and later, if necessary, for Alexandretta.

Don't be very bored with my persistence, Everett; I *am* right; and the business is constantly in my thoughts. I have been very quiet and good for nine months, learning to follow my next ahead nicely, which no doubt is very good for me, but not exhilarating, and I miss the occupation of the previous five years. But I am content to go on doing it until the North Sea business is finished, and I hope I may be left in the *Centurion* on promotion, unless I am wanted for some flag appointment connected with the Grand Fleet, which doesn't seem in the least bit likely yet awhile, as far as I can see."

Nothing came of this letter, and more than a year passed before I was in a position to attack again.

I was promoted to Rear-Admiral on 10th April, 1917, but did not change my uniform or assume the rank, as I was allowed to remain in command of the *Centurion*.

The Dardanelles Commission returned to the charge in April, and I received 22 questions about the Suvla landing, which clearly indicated that the Commission had evidence before them which would—if it were true—point to the most extraordinary lack of organisation and dilatory conduct on the part of the naval officers and men, who strove so strenuously day and night throughout the 7th and 8th August to land, support and

supply the Eleventh Corps in its ill-fated enterprise. I wrote to this effect to the Secretary of the Commission, and went on to say that as there were a number of officers, besides Admiral de Robeck and myself, whose professional conduct was in question, and who could give independent evidence in direct and emphatic contradiction of the statements in some of the questions which concerned the Navy. I had taken considerable pains to trace these officers and was expecting signed statements from as many as were serving in British waters. In the meantime, if any serious allegations against the conduct of the Navy or individual officers had been made in evidence, I trusted that the Commission would give Admiral de Robeck and myself an opportunity of seeing such evidence and replying to it.

Fortunately I had my records with me, and I prepared a statement dealing with all the points raised by the Commission, and added the evidence of a number of officers who happened to be in the Grand Fleet, or within reach. I suggested that the Commission should telegraph certain questions to officers I named, who were serving abroad. Captain Lambart—who had been so closely associated with me throughout the Suvla enterprise—was of immense help, and Admiral de Robeck thoroughly approved of my vigorous replies. I did not want to give evidence or reopen that unhappy affair, but the mean whining complaints against the Navy roused my ire and I was determined that the Commission should hear the truth.

On receipt of my statement the Commission again demanded my attendance, and the Admiralty decided that I should go during the next refit of the *Centurion*, which commenced at Invergordon on the 9th May.

When the *Centurion* was docked and the ship's company went on leave, I went to Aberdour to join my family, but had to leave again on the 14th, to spend two long days under examination by the Commission in London, thereby losing three days out of nine of my precious leave. However, I had the satisfaction of producing overwhelming evidence to dispose of the charges which had been levelled against the Navy.

My examination by the Dardanelles Commission, in one of the committee rooms in the House of Lords, was a curious experience. Lord Cromer, who had been the original chairman,

had died, and Sir William Pickford, a distinguished judge, had taken his place. Evidence was taken on oath.

Some of the Commissioners had obviously not troubled to read my statement, or the evidence I had forwarded some time before, as I was catechised at great length on matters on which I had reported fully. One individual was particularly unpleasant and hardly pretended to believe my statements on the water question.

When I said I had written a detailed account of the proceedings I had witnessed during the Suvla landing, in a diary which I had kept for my wife, and it contained a sketch of a water ship, with her stem on shore at Nibrunesi Point on the day after the landing, Sir William Pickford came to my aid, and asked me to show it to him. After glancing through it, he looked up and said: "Gentlemen, this is evidence," and that ended the matter as far as he was concerned, though not the questions, which were almost innumerable in regard to water.

One member of the Commission—Field-Marshal Lord Nicholson—was at no pains to conceal his opinion of some of the military officers whose conduct was in question. When Admiral Wemyss' vigorous telegrams to the Admiralty were read, he became very restless, and in the luncheon interval, when we were walking along the passage to the restaurant, he said that if he had been in office, *that* Admiral would have been superseded and ordered home at once. I remarked what a wonderful Empire we would be fighting for now, if the efforts of our forebears had been dealt with like that. He asked me what I was referring to? I said at the moment I was thinking of some of Nelson's despatches from the Mediterranean. He retorted that he could see no parallel; Nelson's despatches were mostly concerned with complaints of the paucity of his rewards. That left me almost, but not quite, speechless! When we sat down to lunch, Admiral of the Fleet Sir William May, who had overheard my conversation with Lord Nicholson, remarked, with a friendly look at me, that he had formed the highest opinion of Admiral Wemyss' conduct.

Later the Secretary of the Commission wrote to me to say that my evidence had been of great value, and to ask for a copy of my diary and the sketch I had shown to Sir William Pickford.

When the Commission published its Final Report it made up for my loss of leave, and many hours of work, to find no unfavourable comment of any kind on the conduct of the naval co-operation with the Army ; and the following definite statement :

“ We are of opinion, that throughout the operations the Navy carried out their duties with regard to the supply of sea-borne water, in an efficient manner, and were always ready to render any assistance in their power.”\*

I arrived back at Aberdour on the 17th May, in time to greet my eldest son, who was born early the next morning.

On returning to Invergordon on the 19th, Firebrace, the gunnery officer, and Traill Smith, the navigator, both told me that they also had a son born on the 18th May, and I learnt later that a good many more young “ Centurions ” arrived about the same day !

\* “ Final Report of the Dardanelles Commission,” page 89.

## CHAPTER VII

### SCAPA AGAIN

My flag hoisted in *Colossus* ; The King's visit ; *Vanguard* blows up ; Fleet Boxing Competition ; Discussions with Beatty.

WE returned to Scapa on the 26th May, and remained there for two months, but in the meantime I was offered the appointment of second-in-command of the Fourth Battle Squadron, which I gladly accepted, though I was very sad to leave the *Centurion*.

The Wardroom Officers gave me a farewell dinner and all the Gunroom and Warrant Officers came in for dessert and drank my health. Then Commander Wells, on their behalf, gave me a teak casket with the *Centurion's* crest carved on a medallion, containing an enormous Rear-Admiral's silk flag, "to be flown in battle." He made a little speech which I would have found great difficulty in replying to, had not Fire-brace's dog howled and made us all laugh. Next day I said good-bye to the ship's company, with whom I had spent such a happy year.

On Saturday, the 23rd June, my flag was hoisted in the *Centurion* until sunset, when Rear-Admiral Gaunt's came down and mine was hoisted in the *Colossus*. The officers and ship's company of the *Centurion* were fallen in to see me off, and gave three cheers and one cheer more, as I steamed away in my new barge, and the officers and ship's company of the *Colossus* were fallen in to receive me, when I arrived on board. The Captain, Dudley Pound, had been my First Lieutenant in my first command—the destroyer *Opossum* in 1898.

The Fourth Battle Squadron which was under the command of Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee, consisted of the first nine battleships built after the original *Dreadnought*, and the ships of my Division were the *Colossus*, *Temeraire*, *Bellerophon*, and *St. Vincent*.

H.M. the King had arrived at Scapa to stay with the Commander-in-Chief on the afternoon of 21st June, and that night



all the Flag Officers dined on board the *Queen Elizabeth* to meet His Majesty. I was still Captain of the *Centurion*, so did not go, and when the King visited the *King George V*, to lunch with Admiral de Robeck and inspect the representatives of each ship of the Second Battle Squadron the following day, I had already turned over the *Centurion* to my successor, Captain Dent. However I was invited to dine on board the *Queen Elizabeth* that night, and the next day, the 23rd, to lunch on board the *Hercules* with Admiral Sturdee, as His Majesty was to inspect the representatives of the Fourth Battle Squadron on board her. I had the honour of sitting next to the King at lunch; and I heard him telling Sturdee all about the evacuation of Gallipoli, which he said was the finest thing of the kind in history; and when he spoke to me about it, I told him that the evacuation of Anzac and Suvla had been so successful because the enemy *knew* that we could not be such fools as to go. Moreover they knew that strong reinforcements had come out to the Eastern Mediterranean, and it was incredible that we could be so foolish as to start a new campaign, when we held all the trump cards in Gallipoli. Deserters surrendered every night, and we knew the enemy expected to be attacked, in fact they had been seen rolling out fresh wire the evening before the evacuation. Then I told the King how the weather had broken, and destroyed all the piers and a great many boats and lighters, only a few hours after the men had been taken off.

At Helles the evacuation was a success because, though the enemy *knew* we were going, it was a physical impossibility to embark troops, animals and guns from those storm-swept beaches during that last night—or at least the Turks thought it was—and so though they might have fired some thousands of shells on to the piers and beaches while the evacuation was taking place, they refrained from firing even the normal number, because they did not think it possible for our beach parties to carry out ordinary routine work.

I do not think this explanation had been suggested to His Majesty before, but I think he accepted it as the right one.

After staying four days with the Commander-in-Chief on board the *Queen Elizabeth*, the King embarked in the light cruiser *Castor*, and steamed through the lines of the Fleet, before crossing the Pentland Firth to Thurso. I think it would be

quite impossible to exaggerate the pleasure it gave to the officers and men of the Fleet to see their King in their midst, during their long exile. I am sure that he must have carried away the impression that all was well with the people of his Grand Fleet.

On Sunday morning I went on board the ships of my division, all the officers were presented, and the men marched past me in single file. I told the officers that I had taken the first opportunity of visiting their ships, as I hoped that I was going to have the great privilege of leading them into action, and as that might happen any day, the sooner we knew one another the better.

I took my division into the Flow two or three days after I took command, it was a very good experience, as there was not too much room for manœuvring four capital ships in such confined waters, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

Captain Pound and the gunnery officer, Lieut.-Commander Hawes, were very live wires, and the division had worked up an excellent organisation for divisional fire control, which we frequently practised both in harbour and at sea.

A squadron sailing race took place before I had been in the *Colossus* a week ; I was disappointed to find that my predecessor had not troubled to keep a galley, so I borrowed the Captain's and won the race in a field of about 45 boats, which pleased me very much.

Hitherto no flag officer had left the Fleet since the War began, the spell at Invergordon taking the place of leave, but now that the squadrons were no longer to go there, it was arranged that admirals should take leave while their flagships were refitting, instead of transferring to another ship in the squadron as before.

Admiral Sturdee, who was about to transfer to the *Vanguard* with his Staff, retinue, barge's crew, signalmen, etc., about 50 in all, while the *Hercules* was away refitting, was the first to take advantage of the new arrangement, and he sailed in the *Hercules* on the 28th June, and I assumed temporary command of the Fourth Battle Squadron. Though I should have felt fearfully sorry for Admiral Sturdee, I could not help feeling how wonderful it would be, if the enemy came out during the next fortnight, while he was away on leave !

On the 9th July, I was sitting in my cabin writing, when at 11.40 p.m. I felt a succession of heavy bumps, as if a ship had rammed us and was bumping down our side. My cabins in the *Colossus* were forward, and I went out on to the upper deck to see what it was. The sky was ablaze, and my thoughts turned at once to the Zeppelin raid I had seen at Salonika. I remember thinking that the Zeppelins had come rather far afield, and I asked the signalman on the bridge what had happened. He said, "The *Vanguard*, sir," I asked if she was damaged and he replied: "She's gone." My galley was hoisted just abreast of my cabin, I jumped into her, followed by a number of men who had come up from below, and we went with all speed to where the *Vanguard* had been, but could find nothing but small pieces of pulverised wood and masses of oil. As I wanted to go to the *Queen Elizabeth*, which was about two miles away, to report to the Commander-in-Chief without delay, I hailed a picket boat to come alongside and take me there. I asked what ship she belonged to and the coxswain replied, "*Vanguard*, sir." I said, "Thank God, there are ten *Vanguards* left," and asked him where his boat had been lying. The coxswain then told me that she had been lying off the *Royal Oak*, waiting for 15 officers who were at a concert party on board her; in another 20 minutes they would all have been back on board the *Vanguard*. When the explosion occurred, he had gone full speed towards it, like every other boat in the Fleet, to find that his own ship had disappeared. I then went to the *Queen Elizabeth* and told the Commander-in-Chief, that except for the boat's crew and the officers who were fortunately out of the ship, I was afraid there could be no survivors. Actually three were picked up, a lieutenant-commander horribly burnt, but quite conscious, who died a few hours later; he said he had only just returned on board the *Vanguard* after dining on board another ship. A marine and a stoker were found uninjured, they had both been asleep in their hammocks on the lower deck, and woke up swimming. It happened that four midshipmen were away in destroyers or submarines and three officers and 49 men had been sent on leave to make room for Admiral Sturdee and his people, so the fortunate change of procedure not only spared their lives, but also those of 52 *Vanguards*, but 830 perished, including her captain and

a Japanese naval captain who was attached to the squadron, who had both dined with me a day or two before.

When I returned to the *Colossus*, I found the engineer-commander in great distress, as he had a son on board the *Vanguard*; I told him of the officers on board the *Royal Oak*, and before long, we learnt that his son was fortunately among them.

Admiral Beatty and I agreed that although the explosion was in all probability due to spontaneous combustion of unstable cordite, it would be best to let the Fleet continue to think that this explosion, like the previous ones in the *Natal* and *Bulwark*, was the work of enemy agents.

Curiously enough something occurred which gave colour to this suspicion. The *Vanguard*, which had been anchored off the north shore of the Flow, had a party of dockyard artificers working in the fore turret; as they did not want to spend the night on board, they were sent in a drifter to their depot ship, some miles away; while the *Vanguard* returned to her proper berth in the Fleet. The next day some naval ratings in the depot ship *Victorious* reported that they had suspicion of one of the workmen of Scandinavian appearance, who had been behaving oddly, he had left the *Vanguard* shortly before the explosion, and they knew he had also left the *Natal* just before she blew up. When it was found that he had sent a telegram to his wife, saying that he was safe (which was held up by the Censor) it was not surprising that it was generally believed that he was the author of both explosions. His explanation of his telegram was that his wife knew that he had narrowly escaped being blown up in the *Natal*, and might be alarmed if she heard another ship had blown up. This probably was the explanation, and as there was no proof against him, he was quietly shipped away for his own sake.

The thought that any ship might blow up at any moment, did not seem to bother anyone in the Fleet, and after the Memorial Service the next day, everything went on as usual, including the Grand Fleet Boxing Competition, which was held on the Island of Flotta on 13th July. I can't do better than quote a letter I wrote to my wife on 14th July, which gives some idea of the life and spirit of the Grand Fleet.

" You will have heard by now of the loss of the *Vanguard*. I could not mention it before. . . . We had a wonderfully impressive memorial service on board the *Neptune*, anchored near the spot where her remains lie. The Commander-in-Chief, all the Admirals, and representatives from all the ships attended. Massed bands played the Dead March, and at the end of the service, all the buglers of the Squadron sounded the Last Post and Reveille. The officers and men in the other ships stood at attention with their caps off during the service. I saw a great deal of David Beatty during those days, he is splendid at such times.

The Fifth Battle Squadron's Regatta was held the next day, and the Fleet Boxing Competition the following day. The latter was a wonderful show, Baird of the *Ajax* is a marvellous stage manager. The ring platform was placed in a hollow, and he had built up an arena around it, with planks and spars drawn from the whole Fleet, which enabled 18,000 men to watch. The boxing went on all day from 9 a.m. until 6.15 p.m., and all the admirals and hundreds of officers were there for the finals. David Beatty gave away the prizes on the ring platform, and then made a splendid speech. He told them he got so few opportunities of talking to them, that he was going to say a few words. He referred to the captious critics in the Press, who hint and even say that the Navy is doing nothing. He told them not to mind—it was dull and hard to be patient, but history repeated itself always, and we would have our day, as the fleets of Hawke, Cornwallis, St. Vincent and the immortal Nelson had had theirs. They went through the same weary waiting. He then said inspiring things about the Army's heroic efforts, the deeds of our destroyers, the passing of the *Shark*, the splendid enterprise of our submarines, and the indomitable spirit of the fishermen manning the trawlers and drifters—a tale of glory to hearten us and live up to. A tale which—when it was all written—' would reach from (a long pause) from here to the Canteen.' A roar of applause—I suppose he thought he had been getting rather sentimental! Then he told them what we had to look forward to; something or somebody would drive the enemy out to take the cruel-

ling we meant to give them; when the day came, it must end in their complete annihilation. That would surely come to pass if we were all imbued by one spirit, etc. He dwelt on the importance of keeping fit, mentally and bodily, with special reference to the boxing we had witnessed. He concluded by saying 'Our day will come,' when to quote what King Henry V said to his army before the Battle of Agincourt :

And gentlemen in England now a-bed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not  
here,  
And hold their manhood cheap while any speaks  
That fought with us on *our Great Day*.\*

This was greeted by roars of applause, and the men gave *three cheers which must have nearly lifted the roof off Heaven*. Beatty then joined us in the officers' enclosure, and seeing me, asked me to come for a walk. We went off through a narrow lane, first of officers, then men, and at the back of the crowd, through the trawler and fleet auxiliary men and dockyard workmen, etc., who clapped and leant forward to have a look at him. He is a great man, there is no mistake about that, and the Fleet know it. During our walk he told me, that he had meant to say something about the *Vanguard*, but everyone looked so happy, that he felt it was better not to sadden the proceedings by reminding them of our loss.

We walked hard for an hour and a quarter and talked of many things, and I got back just in time to bathe and dress before my farewell dinner to Pound, who left during the night to take up an appointment at the Admiralty. He is very sad, and I felt so sorry for him, as he will probably not go to sea again during the War, that as a great treat I let him handle the Division on the 11th, when we spent about three hours in the Flow."

Among other things the Commander-in-Chief and I talked about during our walk on Flotta, was the extraordinary fear of invasion, which obsessed so many people who should have known better. Sir David had received a report of a Naval and

\* See *King Henry V*, Act iv, Scene iii.

Military Conference on invasion, held at the War Office in March 1917, and he had asked de Robeck to forward our views on it, in the light of our experience in Gallipoli. I had written a memorandum on the subject, and de Robeck forwarded it to him.

It was to this effect : it appeared that the War Office estimated that the enemy had 160,000 men to spare for the invasion of England, and considered that such a force could be disembarked within 32 hours of the arrival of the transports off the coast. No mention was made of opposition, and the Admiralty had not apparently questioned this optimistic estimate. They considered however, that the enemy had sufficient tonnage to transport a force of 160,000 men. The War Office stated that it would be necessary for the enemy to utilise open beaches, presumably in addition to one or more ports. The First Sea Lord did not consider that a landing on open beaches in any considerable force was practicable, an opinion which I felt sure was shared by every seaman with practical knowledge and experience of the North Sea and its beaches.

The report did not state whether the War Office considered that such a comparatively small force could achieve anything of serious moment, even if it succeeded in landing intact. All our experience in this war had gone to prove, that given the most favourable naval conditions imaginable, a landing in the face of modern opposition was a most hazardous enterprise, bound to incur heavy loss and likely to suffer disastrous results.

Presumably the Admiralty and War Office were in agreement, that it would be necessary for the enemy to secure one or more ports, possessing wharves, docks, and other facilities for disembarking artillery, ammunition, transports, stores, etc., and absolutely essential for them to possess a port for the maintenance of such a force. The capture of the port would probably only be completed by military operations, undertaken after the landing had been effected on neighbouring beaches. Suitable ports were well defended, or ought to be after 32 months of war.

With regard to the capture of the beaches, in Gallipoli our efforts to capture the Helles Beaches were held up by a few well sited machine-guns, and the Turks had neither guns nor howitzers. Apart from the fact that at that date our ships and

transports were immune from the risk of submarine attacks or mines, our ships were able to take up positions in front, on the flanks, and almost in the rear of the enemy, and pour a devastating fire on to their defences, which nevertheless inflicted fearful losses on our troops. Surely if it was possible for the Turks to organise such a defence in the early days of the War, with a comparatively small force, how easy it should be for us, in the light of our experience, to make every available beach impregnable with the aid of deep trenches, well concealed and protected machine-gun positions, and a few guns and howitzers well inland, registered on to the beaches.

It was inconceivable that any landing on a large scale would be attempted while the Grand Fleet was in being, or even in the absence of the Grand Fleet, in the face of the great risks crowded transports would run from mines and attack by submarines, torpedo craft, and light cruisers based in the southern area. But apart from naval considerations, the Germans were well represented in Gallipoli, and were in a position to appreciate the difficulties we experienced, under infinitely more favourable conditions from every point of view, than they could hope for on the east coast of England; and I could not believe that they would be so mad as to undertake such a forlorn, hopeless enterprise.

The authorities who feared invasion had openly expressed their views, which had been well advertised by an influential Military Correspondent and other writers, so the Germans must be well aware that the fear of invasion existed in high quarters. It was only natural that they should encourage these fears in every possible way. I concluded by saying: "That the invasion of England is seriously contemplated by the enemy, at this stage of the War, is simply incredible, and it is quite time this folly was scotched." Admirals Beatty and de Robeck fully agreed with me.

Sir David told me of Admiral Bacon's proposed landing on the Belgian coast between Ostend and Nieuport, in co-operation with the Army's great offensive to capture the Belgian coast, and he asked me for my opinion.

I said that as the Belgian coast was heavily fortified, and every gun on the coast would no doubt be registered on every available landing place and beach, and that these would be



locally defended with wire, machine-gun posts, strong points, and probably howitzers and mobile artillery, the attack, if it was ever delivered, would be a great disaster, and the unfortunate Division which was to carry it out would undoubtedly be annihilated. An opinion which I know now was fully shared by the General who commanded the Division.

Beatty said that he entirely agreed with me, he had in fact suggested that the coastal batteries would destroy the landing, but Admiral Jellicoe had declared that Admiral Bacon assured him that the enemy's guns could only fire to seaward! Sir John had asked Admiral Beatty to send down capital ships to take part in the attack, but he had pointed out that the water was too shallow for them to operate anywhere near the land, and there was no object in their merely making an ineffective demonstration.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ROSYTH

A tactical exercise; Garden fête at Aberdour; Fortune teller's prophecy; Pulling Regatta; Kite balloon adventure; Visit of Sir Rosslyn Wemyss; Appointed Director of Plans at Admiralty; Last shoot; Farewell to Grand Fleet.

CAPTAIN Wilfred Tomkinson had arrived on the 13th July to relieve Pound, and I was delighted to see him again. Since leaving Harwich, he had been in command of a few old "B" class submarines at Venice. He told me that he had had a very interesting time there, but he was very glad to leave, as since the Battle of Jutland, our naval prestige had fallen to zero amongst the Italians, and the situation was unbearable. Latterly he had been in command of the *Aurora*, one of Tyrwhitt's cruisers at Harwich.

Admiral Sturdee returned in the *Hercules* on the 15th, and the next day the whole Fleet went to sea, that night to our surprise and my delight, we found we were heading for Rosyth. It was a very well-kept secret. During the day we carried out a tactical exercise; the Grand Fleet under the Commander-in-Chief, against a skeleton fleet under Admiral Pakenham—commanding the Battle Cruiser Force. When the engagement opened, the old 12-inch guns of three of my comparatively antiquated ships were out of range, so I turned my division together and stood towards the enemy, until our guns could reach them. My flag-lieutenant, Bowlby was very upset, and told me that I was bound to receive a severe reprimand, one could not leave the line without permission. Sure enough the *Queen Elizabeth* was soon dressed with rude signals, but as the Commander-in-Chief had in the meantime altered course to close the enemy, I was able to take up my proper station astern of Admiral Sturdee's Division, without going out of range.

When I next met the Commander-in-Chief, he chaffed me and asked what I meant by going off on my own. I said if he engaged the enemy outside the range of my division, I was sure he would

not expect me to stay there and take punishment, without closing in to reply. He laughed and said, "You will be within effective range of the enemy all right, Roger."

We steamed up the Firth of Forth on the morning of the 17th July. The Battle Fleet moored above the Forth Bridge and the cruisers below. My division was the farthest from the bridge, and the berth of the *Colossus* was seven miles from Aberdour. However, I was able to get there in about an hour, and spent many happy afternoons with my family, making the acquaintance of my son, who was only a few hours old when I last saw him. He was christened in the little church at Aberdour, Sir David Beatty, Captain Lionel Lambart and General Sir Hubert Gough were his godfathers. The two former and a good many Admirals and Captains, and officers of the *Centurion* and *Colossus* were present, so that he was well launched by the Navy.

On 9th August, Lady Beatty held a big garden fête and bazaar, in the grounds of Aberdour House, where she lived all the War. The fête was to raise money for naval charities, everybody went and it was a great success. My wife was in charge of the produce stall. One of the attractions was a fortune teller, and we were all made to go and have our fortunes told. The lady only gave most people a few minutes, but insisted on keeping me for at least half an hour, in spite of the protests of the doorkeeper, who fined me heavily when I came out. She seemed very interested in my hand, and told me things which I thought were absolutely absurd, and I told her so. She said I was shortly to leave the Fleet and go south by train, to take up a completely new life. It would mean uprooting my home and cause great inconvenience. It would be, she said: "As if Sir David sent for you and offered you another appointment, and it is so immediate, that I would not be surprised if it happened to you within the next few weeks." I asked her if I would accept it, she replied, "Obviously, in view of what follows." She told me that I would shortly be promoted to higher rank. I said that was out of the question, I had only been a Rear-Admiral four months and could not be promoted for a few years, and I already had the highest command I could hold in my rank. She replied: "Nevertheless it is true." Then she told me that

I would take part in a battle, after which my name would be as well known all over the world as Sir David Beatty's. She told me that after that I would hold one high appointment after another. I asked her for the date of the battle, she hesitated a good deal and said, "I think about the end of January or February next year." She then asked me if I went up very high. I said possibly 70 or 80 feet (the height of my upper bridge), but why? She said that she thought it was higher than that, I would be in great danger, not while I was at a great height, but when I was coming down. I had visions of the upper bridge being blown away by a shell just after I had left it. She asked me if I would mind her telling my fortune by cards, she had great faith in them. She got quite excited and said all she had seen in my hand was written in the cards. I thought it was all great nonsense, but my wife asked me to write it all down, and I did so that evening—hence this account.

On 27th August, the Fourth Battle Squadron had its Annual Pulling Regatta, and the *Colossus* won the Squadron Cup for the highest aggregate of points. My small daughters followed the races with me in my barge, and screamed themselves hoarse shouting the ship's slogan: "Sloshers."

The exercising area at Rosyth was not nearly as good as that at Scapa, but we managed to put in a good deal of sub-calibre and torpedo firing, and I was very happy preparing for the day.

The enemy had made great use of smoke-screens in the Battle of Jutland, and the leaders of our battleship divisions now towed kite balloons, at a height of about 1,000 feet. An observer in telephonic communication with the bridge was not only able to keep an Admiral informed of the enemy's movements behind a smoke-screen, but could control indirect fire over it.

I was anxious to see for myself, and on two or three occasions went up in the balloon and manœuvred my division from it. One day I had a very unpleasant experience. I was up in the balloon, with some destroyers making a smoke-screen between my division and a vessel towing a target; it came on to blow very hard, and we saw a kite balloon, which had parted its cable, driving away towards the North Sea without anyone in it. I asked my pilot what would happen to it, he said it would blow away until it lost its gas, and eventually would fall into the sea.

I then asked him what he would do if our cable parted. He said he would try to rip the balloon near some ship, and he hoped we would be picked up. I noticed that we swayed and pitched a good deal, hitherto I had found the balloon very steady and peaceful. The pilot told me that it was because it had lost a good deal of gas, the nose had flattened, and if a balloon was not very buoyant, the cable was apt to slacken, which made it very jerky and unsteady.

I had watched the *King George V's* balloon when it was being hauled down in a similar condition, it charged about in all directions, and plunged its basket into the sea on either quarter, fortunately it was only ballasted with sandbags and there was no one in it.

The weather rapidly got worse, and Captain Tomkinson telephoned to me that he thought we had better come down. I began to think so, too, my pilot was a most gloomy companion. As we were hauled down, the balloon swayed about, just as the *King George V's* balloon had done, and as we nearly touched the sea on either quarter, the pilot groaned: "Now we are for it, sir." It really was very unpleasant, and the *Colossus* appeared to be flicking about in a most alarming way. Eventually about 100 men on the quarter-deck managed to seize the rope hanging from the basket, as we were swept across the deck, and we landed safely, but I have never felt so seasick in my life, and as I walked forward to my cabin, the *Colossus* now seemed to be rolling and pitching heavily.

One day I was sent for by the Commander-in-Chief, and I found him standing at a tall desk writing, as he generally did. Sir Eric Geddes—the new First Lord—was with him, and Sir David told me that the First Lord wanted to ask me some questions. The latter then said that he had been told that I knew Sir Rosslyn Wemyss better than anyone else. Everyone of the Admiralty War Staff seemed to be overwhelmed with the magnitude of the daily task, and he wanted to add someone to the Board, who would have time to look ahead, with the idea of prosecuting the War more vigorously. Among others, he had Sir Rosslyn Wemyss in mind. I said if he wanted someone to conceive brilliant strategic enterprises, I did not think that that was in Sir Rosslyn's line, but if he wanted someone who

would get the right sort of people about him, back them through thick and thin, accept any amount of responsibility, and never get rattled or worried, Wemyss was his man. Sir Eric thanked me, and I withdrew.

Soon after we heard that Wemyss had been appointed Deputy First Sea Lord under Sir John Jellicoe, and a few days later, I received a telegram from Wemyss to say that he was coming to Rosyth next day, would I give him lunch. He arrived rather early, and we walked up and down outside my cabin and had lots to talk about. I had not seen him since he left Mudros in December, 1915, since then he had seen the Mesopotamia Campaign carried to a successful issue, and had been about to go to the Mediterranean as Commander-in-Chief. He told me the latter had always been his ambition and he hated the thought of his new appointment. Then suddenly he turned to me, and said I was to come to the Admiralty to help him. I laughed and said that was absolutely out of the question, I had just hoisted my flag in the Grand Fleet, was fearfully happy, and could not possibly go to the Admiralty. He said no more, and we talked about other things. After lunch he said he knew the Commander-in-Chief wanted to see me, and as he had to go to the *Queen Elizabeth*, we had better go together in my barge. I began to be afraid that matters had already been arranged without reference to me, and I found they had. When we went into Sir David's cabin, he was standing at his desk, and without looking round he said: "So you are going to leave me, Roger." I said: "Apparently I have no say in the matter." He replied: "None whatever, you will be of much greater value to the Service at the Admiralty than commanding a few old battleships here." I was very distressed and unhappy, though of course I had no choice but to accept my fate and hope for the best. I thought, too, of my gallant wife, who was very happy at Aberdour, having to undertake another trek, with yet another addition to the family.

Wemyss told me that I was to be Director of a new Division of the Naval Staff—the Plans Division. There would be two Assistant Directors, Captains Pound and Cyril Fuller. The former was already in charge of a Plans Section in the Operations Division, which would be transferred to my Division. Only a few weeks ago I had condoled with Pound, and now I was to share his unhappy fate and sit in an office, but I was glad to

know that I would have him with me, for I had formed the highest opinion of him. Fuller, too, was a friend, who I knew would be pleasant to work with. But how I hated the whole business, and the thought of all the unpleasantness in front of me. I had spent so many years striving for things other people did not want to do, and I was under no illusions as to the hostility I would encounter, if I did all I knew I should feel impelled to do. It seemed indeed hard to have to leave all my good friends and my happy life in the Grand Fleet for such a prospect, while there was a chance of a battle in the North Sea.

Fortunately my successor—Rear-Admiral Douglas Nicholson—was not available to relieve me for about a fortnight or so, and I made the most of my last days in the Grand Fleet. The Fleet sailed on the 16th September and we carried out tactical exercises on our way to Scapa. This time Admiral Sturdee commanded the skeleton fleet representing the enemy, and the *Colossus*—representing four battleships—led his van. It blew very hard, with squalls of driving rain and hail, which frequently reduced the visibility to a few hundred yards, and I was anxious about our balloon, which was hidden from view at these times, but it was a relief to see the towing cable as taut as a bar, and thus know that it was still attached and buoyant.

After a long spell of low visibility, during which we could not see the rest of our fleet, and were uncertain of the position of the enemy, the *Colossus* emerged from a violent rain squall, and we sighted the Grand Fleet not yet deployed, in a position which would enable us to gain a considerable tactical advantage if we acted promptly.

Admiral Sturdee was not yet in sight, and although he, too, would emerge from the rain squall in a few minutes, I felt that there was no time to lose, and committed the fleet to a course which he would have no choice but to follow, conscious that I might well be severely criticised later. However, at a conference of Flag Officers on board the *Queen Elizabeth* the next day, Admiral Sturdee thoroughly approved of what I had done, and so did the Commander-in-Chief.

Both Admirals Beatty and de Robeck invited me to farewell dinners, and both came to mine, as did Admirals Sturdee, Goodenough, and Commodore Brand—the very popular Captain of the Fleet—and most of my best friends. At Scapa

the wind and sea get up with amazing rapidity, and though it was quite peaceful at 7 p.m., at 8 o'clock, when it was too late to put the dinner off, the weather was very unpleasant. However everyone got on board safely. It was very peaceful in my cabin, and we could not hear the rising storm. The departure was very anxious work, it was blowing a strong gale, and a heavy sea had got up. The barges and picket-boats made very heavy weather, and it was a relief to get signals to say that my guests had got safely back to their ships. Brand had wisely ordered the *Queen Elizabeth's* drifter to take the Commander-in-Chief back, and he gave a passage to several of the others who had stopped their boats coming. While the *Queen Elizabeth's* drifter was lying astern of the *Colossus*, our balloon burst and nearly smothered her, and it was half an hour before she could be got alongside. Thus ended my last dinner party in the Grand Fleet, in typical Scapa weather.

About midnight, when I had heard that everyone was safely on board their ships, it was reported to me that a large oiler was drifting across our bows. She drifted from one side to another, just missing us time after time, thanks to our veering cable at each critical moment to avoid her. In the end she took a big yaw towards the *Revenge*, so we promptly hove in our cable, and managed to get clear ahead of her, before she sheered over towards the *Colossus* again.

Our *Centurion* shooting syndicate having lost French and Fitzroy, had recruited Lieutenant Rotherham and Engineer-Commander Stocker. The latter, who had been with me throughout my submarine service, and was Chief Engineer Officer the latter part of the time, had joined the *Centurion* before I left her. We took the shoot in July, and were looking forward to the 12th August, when we unexpectedly went to Rosyth. During my last few days however, we managed to get two days' shooting. I took Tomkinson, and we invited the old carpenter to land with his ferrets and get as many rabbits as he could.

We got 17 brace of grouse, and during lunch the schoolmaster at Hobister brought a flatcoated retriever, and begged us to take it, as the owner could no longer afford to feed it properly. Victor Crutchley bought her for £1 and went straight off to look for a bird we had lost before lunch, and found it. The next



day we shot, it came on to blow a howling gale while we were on shore, and I had to leave my barge anchored under shelter until the weather moderated, while we walked to the Royal Naval Air Station at Hoy and borrowed a drifter. They certainly are splendid sea boats, and the skipper handled it wonderfully, there was a tremendous sea running, and I was able to step from the bows of the drifter on to the quarter-deck of the *Colossus*, as the drifter rose to a heavy sea.

The next day, Sunday, 23rd September, was my last day in the Grand Fleet, a lovely sunny still day, and Admiral Sturdee came on board to present the Regatta Cup which we had won, and say good-bye to me. After congratulating the ship's company on their win, he told them he was very sorry that the Fourth Battle Squadron was losing me, and said something very nice about our deployment in the tactical exercise, which was charming of him. So ended one of the happiest memories of my life, and my last holiday in the War. How I hated leaving all those good people, who just lived for the day when they could wipe out all past disappointments, in a victory worthy of our inheritance.

I do not believe the German Navy, which seems to have forgotten the most humiliating surrender in the maritime history of the world, and only remembers its "Victory of Skagerack," will ever realise what would have been its fate, if it had met the Grand Fleet of 1917, led by David Beatty.

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE ADMIRALTY

London Air Raids ; Plans and Projects ; Channel Barrage Committee ; Visit to Dover and Dunkirk.

I STOPPED for three days at Aberdour to help my wife pack up, before taking up my Admiralty appointment on the 28th September. She followed two days later with our son and his nurse, to look for a house in London. Her train arrived about 8 p.m. Unfortunately it was a moonlight period and an air raid warning had been sounded before the train came in, but luckily I had engaged a taxi, whose driver was sporting enough to wait and take us to the house we had been lent in Wyndham Place, though he would not wait for the luggage.

The air raid started immediately after we got there, and the housemaid caretakers were very glad of our company, as they had been thoroughly frightened by a bomb which had demolished a house nearby in a previous raid. As there was no cook in the house, my wife and I always went out for meals, which was rather inconvenient as air raids started just before dinner-time on the next two nights. The next night we dined in Hereford Gardens and decided to walk there during a lull in the firing as it was not far, but it started again before we were through Bryanston Square, and was quite unpleasant, as small pieces of our shrapnel bounced on the pavement like hail. My wife picked up a piece, and said she wished she had brought her umbrella ! As we crossed Oxford Street, we saw a man being carried away on a stretcher, who had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. We got to our friends' house safely, but as their kitchen had a glass roof we had to wait until the air raid was over before we could have our dinner.

The following evening I heard at the Admiralty that there was a raid coming, so got a car and went to fetch my wife, as we were dining in Eaton Square, and we got there just before

the raid began. It was unpleasantly close, as bombs were dropped in Ebury Street, Eaton Terrace and Chelsea. We had to walk back to Wyndham Place that night as all the vehicles had gone home. We began to think that London was a nasty, uncomfortable place after the peace and quiet of life in the Grand Fleet and its bases, but the combination of moonlight and fine weather had now come to an end and we had a peaceful spell.

The Plans Division of which I was now Director was divided into two sections, one for operations under Captain Pound, and the other for the provision and preparation of material with which to carry out operations, under Captain Fuller.

Early in September an inter-Allied Conference, which was attended by the naval representatives of all the Allied Powers, had met to consider measures to counter the increasing menace of the enemy's submarine campaign. Admiral Jellicoe had submitted two alternative plans: one, that the Allies should block the German harbours in the North Sea and the Baltic, with a view to stopping the exit of enemy submarines, which were now destroying our shipping more rapidly than it could be replaced. The Allies possessed 40 old battleships and 43 old cruisers, which the Naval Staff had considered could be spared and would suffice. I am not surprised that this suggestion was rejected, for it certainly was not a feasible operation of war.

The other project was to lay an enormous mine barrage across the northern part of the North Sea. The enemy had been able to sweep channels through our minefields in the Heligoland Bight, but the proposed minefield would be out of reach for sweeping operations, unless the enemy supported them so far afield with strong forces prepared to fight. At least 100,000 mines would be required, and as our munition factories were very fully employed, the possibility of carrying out the project depended on what the American Navy was prepared to do. In the meantime Pound's section had been working out the details for the immense undertaking, and that was the situation when I arrived.

Shortly before I joined, an operation against enemy submarines was carried out in the North Sea, in which a number

of destroyers and a great many drifters with hydrophones took part; the latter laid and attended mined nets which extended across the route which German submarines were known to take when returning to the Heligoland Bight.

The operation was still in progress when I arrived, and was carried out with the most dogged perseverance in appalling weather for several days. At the time we thought that at least three submarines had been destroyed. This was confirmed later by the Naval Intelligence Department, and after the War we learnt from German sources that three submarines had disappeared which should have returned at that time.

When I reported myself to the First Sea Lord—Sir John Jellicoe—he handed me a sheet of notepaper, with a list in his own handwriting of every conceivable offensive operation, from the capture of Heligoland and Borkum to the blocking of Zeebrugge and Ostend. In fact, as someone remarked to me, every wildcat scheme that had ever been suggested to the Admiralty.

After examining a plan showing the numerous batteries and fortifications which commanded the approaches to Zeebrugge and Ostend, I did not think even the latter would be feasible. I had made up my mind, however, to devote my energies to two objects, which I thought were of paramount importance :

(1) To stop submarines streaming through the Straits of Dover. Commodore W. R. Hall, Director of Naval Intelligence, assured me that they were passing through at the rate of over 30 a month; notwithstanding the assertion of the Admiral of the Dover Patrol that the Straits were closed by his anti-submarine nets, and that nothing was passing through.

(2) To get the Admiralty to guarantee that the transport of an army for the invasion of England was an impossible operation for the enemy to undertake, and thus release some hundreds of thousands of men for service with the Army in France who were now kept in England to defend it.

Admiral Beatty had particularly enjoined me to inquire into the fate of Captain Munro's scheme for closing the Straits, and said that as he had made Scapa Flow, Cromarty and the Firth

of Forth absolutely submarine-proof, it seemed a pity not to make use of his services.

I sent for the papers on the subject and found that in April, 1917, Captain Munro had forwarded, through the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, a scheme for closing the Dover Straits from the Goodwins to a position four miles south-west of Calais, with an anti-submarine net of his own design. He had worked it out in great detail, and Commander Little had reported on it very favourably from a submarine point of view. The Admiralty had informed the Commander-in-Chief that Munro's proposal had been referred to Admiral Bacon, who had been requested to arrange a date for Captain Munro to confer with him at Dover.

Sir David Beatty's comment on this reply was: "This after a delay of 12 days. No wonder we don't get on with the War, D. B." When Mr. Churchill and Lord Fisher left the Admiralty, papers had resumed their habit of drifting leisurely down their peacetime channels, and after a lapse of about three weeks, in response to hastening telegrams from the Commander-in-Chief, he was informed that reports from Dover showed the scheme to be quite impracticable in the local conditions which prevailed, the question of the effectiveness of the obstruction did not arise, and that Dover officers, who had far more experience of local conditions than Captain Munro declared that the net could not be maintained. There was therefore no object in Captain Munro visiting Dover.

Admiral Bacon's comments were scathing: "A glance at the scheme was sufficient to condemn it. Captain Munro's scheme would not last a single tide in the channel. The Dover Patrol was up against hard facts and hard work, he had no men, vessels or time to waste," and his report dwelt upon the immense amount of work which the maintenance of the existing barrage imposed.

But Munro had *proved* his title to be considered an unrivalled expert in the laying and maintaining of anti-submarine obstructions, in the fierce tideways in the entrances of Scapa, Cromarty and the Firth of Forth; moreover, he was sanguine of his ability to maintain his proposed barrage.

Fortunately information fell into our hands most opportunely, which refuted Admiral Bacon's claim and corroborated the

Naval Intelligence Department's contention that the German submarines had no difficulty in passing through the Straits, and that great numbers were doing so. *UC44* was blown up on one of her own mines off Waterford, and was raised and examined; a number of valuable papers were found, including her instructions for passing through the Straits of Dover.

"It is best to pass this (i.e., the Dover net defence) on the surface; if forced to dive, go down to 40 metres. . . . As far as possible, pass through the area between Hoofden and Cherbourg without being observed and without stopping; on the other hand, the boats which in exceptional cases pass round Scotland are to let themselves be seen as freely as possible, in order to mislead the English."

In April, 1915, Admiral Bacon had superseded Admiral Hood at a few hours' notice, pledged to stop submarines going through the Straits of Dover. He recommended the abandonment of his predecessor's Folkestone-Gris Nez barrage, and proposed substituting a number of tripods, consisting of rails to be erected across the Straits, from which nets were to be suspended; these, he declared, would prove an absolute barrier against submarines within two months. A great quantity of material was collected, but the scheme was quite impracticable and was very soon dropped. He then designed the existing barrages, the futility of which were now fully exposed. Now, after two and a half years, German submarines were passing through the Straits, causing enormous losses to our shipping in the Channel and its western approaches day after day, threatening the very life of the country and our ability to maintain our armies in the field. This could only be stopped by waging "ruthless, relentless, remorseless" (Lord Fisher's phrase) war, not only on the German submarines but on the misguided policy which so greatly facilitated their operations.

On the strength of the information found in *UC44*, I opened the campaign by resubmitting the papers relating to Munro's scheme, with a minute to the effect that the information circulated by the Naval Intelligence Department, clearly established the fact that enemy submarines used the Straits practically unmolested, suffering little or no inconvenience from the mobile

patrols or explosive barrage. Under the circumstances, too much weight should not be attached to the opinion of the officers who had been responsible for this area for over two years. Captain Munro's net barrage might or might not be the solution, but I was definitely of the opinion that the passage of the Straits of Dover could, and ought to be, made a most hazardous proceeding. We were not likely to arrive at the solution if suggestions were subjected to criticism such as that made by the Vice-Admiral at Dover.

Unless the passage was made difficult and dangerous by the time the Northern Barrage was established, the latter would be a waste of effort and material, and would only tend to divert the submarines through the Straits, into waters which must necessarily be drawn on for patrol vessels if the Northern Barrage was to be effectively patrolled.

That the measures which had been, and apparently were still, in force against submarines in the Dover Straits were quite ineffective, could hardly be questioned. The Admiral at Dover proposed to lay a deep minefield between the Varne and Gris Nez; the mines would soon be available, but they could only be effective, if special steps were taken to drive the submarines down into the minefield, by *night* as well as *day*. I concluded by saying that I did not think that the question of an efficient barrage or obstruction would be satisfactorily solved, until we had the advice and assistance of the most expert civil engineers in the country, and that I was making investigations in this connection.

I followed this up the next day, by submitting a proposal for an operation on similar lines to that which had recently been carried out in the North Sea. Briefly the plan aimed at making the passage between the Varne and Folkestone unpleasant for submarines—by means of patrols and mined nets—for some days prior to the laying of a deep minefield between the Varne and Gris Nez; the object being to make the submarines avoid the passage to the northward, and get into the habit of passing to the southward of the Varne, by the time the deep minefield was laid. Then, since it was known that the submarines passed through the Straits at night, it was proposed, directly the deep minefield was laid, to patrol the latter thoroughly, using searchlights and flares, to force the enemy down on to the mines.

Captain Pound, who originated this idea, was sent to Dover on 27th October to explain it to the Vice-Admiral, who, however, did not approve of it. He said it might lead to aircraft observation and betray the laying of the deep minefield !

In anticipation of the Admiralty ordering the operation, the necessary mined nets were prepared, and on 9th November, 20 drifters were ready at Harwich to carry it out.

The Vice-Admiral was asked if he required these mined nets for the proposed operation ; he replied that he had no objection to trying these nets, but not before the end of the month at the earliest. As this would have immobilised 20 drifters for some weeks, they were used elsewhere.

In the meantime, Admiral Bacon was directed to report fully on the existing measures for denying the Straits to enemy submarines, and was asked what steps were being taken to improve them, in view of the definite information we now possessed, which of course had been sent to him.

He reported on 8th November at considerable length. After giving a short history of the barrage, which he said would " indicate best its progress," he went on to say that the questions in the Admiralty letter were difficult to answer precisely ; the barrage was, as he had shown, always in a state of improvement and modification, to suit altering conditions and methods on the part of the enemy.

In regard to the future, the buoys to which the jackstay was attached, which carried a 60-foot mined net, were being duplicated to add flotation, and it was proposed to float a 20-foot mined net to stop submarines that might attempt the passage on the surface. The net result of the main barrage, as it now existed, was that mining by German submarines on the north coast of France had fallen to nil, instead of being one of the worst mined places, and German destroyers never ventured to cross it into the Channel.

He also gave the positions of the barrages on the Belgian coast and North Goodwins. These, he declared, had done excellent work, and as they were strengthened and improved, they would limit more and more submarine and destroyer activity.

He concluded by drawing attention to a record which accompanied his report, showing the enormous amount of work which had been carried out by the drifter patrol, in laying and maintaining these barrages, during the last 16 months.



Comment on this report was fairly obvious; the Admiralty questions which were difficult to answer had not been answered. Enemy destroyers could sink the buoys which carried the mined nets of the barrage at any moment, and free a passage through it if they wanted to. Submarines ignored it, but wanted us to think it effective, and continued to go through the Straits without inconvenience. The work carried out by the drifter patrol was certainly a marvellous achievement, and it was deplorable that its indomitable efforts should all have been in vain.

When the papers disclosing the state of affairs reached the First Lord (Sir Eric Geddes) he attacked the matter with characteristic vigour and complete disregard of any personal considerations. On 13th November he presided over a conference attended by Sir John Jellicoe, Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, five captains (including my two Assistant Directors), Colonel Alexander Gibb (whose firm was responsible for completing Rosyth Dockyard in two years, and for undertaking to do so when war broke out and it was thought to be a physical impossibility to finish the work for some years), Professors Bragg and McLennan (two distinguished scientists), Mr. W. McLellan (an able civil engineer), and myself.

The discussion ranged over a wide field: nets (mined and otherwise), explosive jackstays to catch submarines on the surface, great mines which lay on the bottom and were fired by acoustic or magnetic impulse when a vessel passed over them, electric cable which detected the passage of iron vessels above them. The possibility of building concrete forts, floating or fixed, equipped with searchlights, guns, hydrophones and watching stations was also considered. My brother Adrian, who was engaged in hunting submarines in the western part of the Channel, suggested this last idea to me. After some discussion, the First Lord decided to appoint a small committee to carry out investigations, and asked me to preside over it, the other members being Colonel Gibb, Mr. W. McLellan, Captain Learmonth (the assistant Hydrographer, who had also had a great deal to do with the provision of nets), Captain Lichfield Speer (the Director of Mines and Torpedoes), and Captain Fuller. Our terms of reference were wide; the "Channel Barrage Committee" was to investigate and report

on the possible measures for constructing a barrage between England and France, and was particularly charged with the following duties :

(a) To consider in what respects the barrage already attempted has not been successful—and why?

(b) To consider in detail the practicability from all points of view and probable efficiency of any scheme or schemes which can be put forward, showing clearly every detailed requirement which is involved in the construction, equipment, maintenance, and defence of the barrage, in the matter of personnel, plant, materials and equipment—the latter, of course, including all vessels and guns employed in its defence.

The Committee was empowered to call in for advice any experts on subjects connected with the inquiry ; in particular to obtain from the Vice-Admiral at Dover all information bearing upon the point mentioned above in (a), including the method of working the patrol vessels.

It was essential that the inquiry should be completed as quickly as possible, and if the report was likely to be delayed beyond a fortnight from the date of the first meeting, an interim report was to be furnished reporting progress.

The Admiralty directed Admiral Bacon to supply the Committee with the information required under its terms of reference, and on the 20th November, when we visited Dover to carry out investigations on the spot, he handed us a lengthy statement covering eight sheets of closely typewritten foolscap and, in addition, details of his mobile patrol.

The Admiral must have found our visit very trying ; however, he was very pleasant to us and gave us an excellent lunch on board the destroyer leader *Swift*, in which we embarked to examine the barrage. I happened to be standing alongside him on the bridge when the *Swift* ran into a floating mined net, a section of the 20-foot net (referred to on page 119) which was being tested for endurance. The mines, like those of the 60-foot vertical nets, were operated by batteries contained in the great iron bouys which supported the jackstays, to which the nets were suspended. I remarked to the Admiral. " Now

I suppose we blow up," but fortunately the firing device was not very reliable, and the only thing that suffered was the net, which was torn to shreds by the *Swift's* propellers.

The buoys on which the whole net defence depended were very large and stood up well above the surface; some were even lit by gas for the guidance of our patrols, which kept to the westward of them, and there was nothing to prevent enemy destroyers coming down on a dark night and sinking as many of the buoys as they wished. That they had refrained from doing so, and that no hostile action had been taken by enemy submarines in the Dover Patrol area for some time, was now fully explained by the information found in *UC44*.

Having inspected the barrage, the Admiral suggested that we should visit his batteries, which supported the left flank of the Army in Flanders. We were delighted to accept his offer, so the *Swift* went on to Dunkirk, where motors met us and took us out to the naval batteries behind the Belgian lines. Here Admiral Bacon was in his element, and at his very best; in addition to the naval 9.2-inch and six-inch guns, manned by seamen and marines, which were mounted in well-protected concrete emplacements, he took us to see a 12-inch gun, taken from one of our early pre-dreadnought battleships, mounted in the middle of a field and concealed under what looked like a Dutch barn. The gun had been given an elevation up to 45 degrees, which gave it sufficient range to engage the 15-inch gun at Leugenboom, which bombarded Dunkirk at a range of 26 miles. Whenever Leugenboom opened fire, the old 12-inch gun replied and generally silenced it with a few rounds. This battery was a masterpiece of improvisation, and we all came away immensely impressed by Admiral Bacon's inventive ingenuity.

I had much conversation with the Admiral during our long day. He was about to lay the deep minefield between the Varne and Gris Nez. I expressed my view that a deep minefield would be quite valueless, unless the water above it was closely patrolled night and day. He said he had one P-boat patrolling there, but beyond increasing this patrol to four P-boats on the completion of the minefield, he did not propose to take any other steps. I told him that we were making inquiries to find out if there were any spare lightships available, which could be

converted into vessels to carry searchlights ; we wanted vessels of that type which could be moored to ride out the heaviest gale. I also told him that the flares designed by Wing-Commander Brock (son of the founder of Brock's Fireworks) were wonderfully efficient and would illuminate a great expanse of water ; these could be readily operated from a trawler or drifter. Pending the provision of special stationary ships to carry searchlights, I suggested that the minefield could be lit by Brock's flares and the searchlights of the patrol vessels.

Admiral Bacon said he had no intention of burning searchlights and flares from vessels that could be stalked and torpedoed by enemy submarines. I hoped, however, that he would appreciate the vital importance of patrolling and illuminating his deep minefields, and thought that his fertile ingenuity would probably design something effective.

As I anticipated, the very next day Admiral Bacon produced an elaborate scheme, which included the extension of his minefields and the construction of bulged vessels to carry searchlights and guns, and also the establishment of searchlights on shore at Folkestone and Cape Gris Nez. A few days later he followed these recommendations by a letter, in which he declared that if the matter was dealt with energetically, there was no reason why the passage of submarine boats should not practically be denied within two months from that date.

Only we simply could not afford to wait while special ships and devices were being constructed. During the month of October, 289,000 tons of shipping had been sunk in the Atlantic, and 62,500 tons in the Channel by enemy submarines, most of which had passed through the Straits of Dover ; and although the losses in the Atlantic were at a somewhat lower rate at the moment, those in the Channel showed no signs of declining. The closing of the Straits was of immediate importance and there was no time to waste on ceremony and precedent.

In an interim report, forwarded on the 29th November, we stated that the two barriers already attempted had each consisted of some sort of net. The first, from Folkestone to Gris Nez, consisted of a heavy non-detachable net without mines. It was never completed, and ultimately was abandoned. It was similar to the nets employed with such success in the Firth of Forth and Swin, but was ineffective, chiefly because the

equipment for its maintenance was not sufficient, and it was not protected from neutral and British merchant vessels, which at that time were not completely controlled and frequently broke through it.

The second barrier was that constructed by Admiral Bacon (already described), which extended from the Goodwins to Dunkirk, with flanking nets off the Belgian coast and the Goodwins. It was true that he intended to double the numbers of the supporting buoys, to reduce the sagging and bring the jackstays supporting the net nearer the surface; but the mine nearest the surface was six to eight feet below the jackstay, and the ease with which a craft could pass over such a jackstay was illustrated by an incident which occurred during a visit we paid to the Swin, where an experimental length of barrage was laid. Here the craft we were in, drawing 14 feet of water, passed safely over the top jackstay, although this was fitted with substantial timber floats, and the mooring buoys were only 500 feet apart, as compared with 1,500 feet, the existing spacing of the Dover barrage, or the proposed spacing of 750 feet.

Admiral Bacon proposed to lay a second line of buoys about 70 yards distant, with a mined net floating on the surface between them and the main line of buoys, in order "to entangle the propellers of any vessel attempting to pass on the surface." Judging by the *Swift's* experience, we did not consider that the main barrage or floating net, even if the latter withstood rough weather, could be regarded as effective against submarines attempting to pass on the surface. Moreover the barrage did not claim to be effective against a submarine diving below the net. In fact enemy submarines, acting under their instructions, would unquestionably continue to go over or under the net as they pleased.

Further, the complete ineffectiveness of the existing barrages was amply proved by the Naval Intelligence Department, which possessed records of 253 passages of enemy submarines through the Channel in 1917 up to 14th November, excluding the whole of July, of which they had no record. Nearly all these passages had been carried out at night; and from the evidence of prisoners and other information in our hands, it was evident that the submarines went through on the surface.

The immunity from attack which had been enjoyed in the Dover Patrol area for some time, which Admiral Bacon attributed to the efficacy of his anti-submarine measures, was fully accounted for by the instructions for the conduct of German submarines found in *UC44* (see page 117).

We pointed out that new appliances would require time and experiment before reliability could be secured ; we had therefore endeavoured to find some method by which a more immediate obstacle could be provided, remarking that the problem would be simplified if as much as possible of the Channel could be denied to friendly as well as to enemy craft by a minefield ; and we strongly urged that efforts should be made to make the patrol of the deep minefields effective, at night as well as day, by means of searchlights and flares from patrol vessels, and subsequently from vessels moored at suitable intervals.

We reported that we had discussed these points with Admiral Bacon during our visit to Dover, and he had since proposed a scheme which in general principles coincided with the views we had expressed. We considered that if a satisfactory form of explosive surface obstruction could be devised, it would form a valuable adjunct to the minefield, and the combination would constitute a barrier across the Channel much more effective than any form of mined indicator net, such as had been used up to the present.

As our report was a scathing indictment of his anti-submarine measures, I sent a copy to Admiral Bacon on the day it was submitted to the Admiralty, because I have always made a practice of showing any adverse report to the officer concerned.

To my great relief I received a friendly reply, in which he said the only paragraph with which he was in total disagreement was that concerning the Folkestone-Gris Nez barrage, which, he declared, never stood winter weather ; he went on to say that he had a surface obstruction he had been working at for some time which promised well, and he proposed to try it near the Varne.

As the Folkestone-Gris Nez barrage was ancient history, and he did not object to the rest of our report, we were encouraged to hope that he would tackle the problem vigorously and make a satisfactory job of it.

Although we did not know it at the time, it is an interesting fact that this much abused Folkestone-Gris Nez heavy net barrage was actually responsible for denying the Straits of Dover to German submarines for more than a year. Early in April, 1915, a few days before Admiral Bacon succeeded Admiral Hood, *U32* was entangled in the net on her way westward, and decided to go home round the north of Scotland rather than face its perils again. As the result of *U32*'s experience, the German Naval Staff forbade the submarines to attempt the passage of the Straits, and ordered them to go north about on their way to the western approaches of the Channel. This prohibition continued for over a year, during which time the Dover area and the eastern portion of the Channel were free from hostile submarine action.

Mr. Churchill tells us that an injustice was done to Admiral Hood, whose anti-submarine measures were deemed to have failed, and upon Lord Fisher's advice he had transferred him to another command and "appointed in his stead Admiral Bacon, whose mechanical aptitude and scientific attainments seemed specially to be required on this critical station"\* (i.e. Dover Patrol).

\* "The World Crisis," page 293.

## CHAPTER X

### PLANS FOR BLOCKING ZEEBRUGGE AND OSTEND

Previous expedition in 1798; Bayly's and Tyrwhitt's proposals; Staff appreciation sent to Dover.

MEANWHILE Pound and I had again studied the plans of the defences of Zeebrugge and Ostend, with a view to blocking the Bruges Canal at Zeebrugge, and the entrance to Ostend harbour. I must confess that I thought the approach would be rather a formidable proposition, through waters commanded by over 200 heavy guns. However, he suggested that the use of smoke had been developed to such an extent, that the operation might be carried out under the cover of smoke-screens.

We then discussed the outline of a plan, and decided that it should be possible to get the necessary vessels ready by the middle of March, so a Staff officer was detailed to prepare a table, giving the days in March on which a blocking operation—which must take place approximately at high water—could be carried out alternatively in hours of darkness, or at the break of dawn.

The Staff was then directed to prepare an appreciation of the pros and cons of such an operation, and to collect all the information which the Admiral, charged with the execution of the enterprise, would require in order to prepare his plan.

The idea of attacking the Belgian canal system was not new. The lock gates of the Bruges Canal at Ostend, which took five years to build, were destroyed by a combined naval and military expedition in 1798, the object being to dislocate the French plan for the invasion of England, which was maturing. Captain H. R. Popham commanded a squadron of 27 vessels, in which 1,400 troops under Major-General Eyre Coote were embarked.

The operation was carried out with the utmost gallantry and dash, and the whole force would have been withdrawn, with



trifling loss, had not the ardour of the naval and military commanders inspired them to undertake the hazard, despite a rising gale, because information reached them that a number of transports, which had been fitting out at Flushing, were about to proceed by the canals to Ostend and Dunkirk.

By the time the landing force had accomplished their mission, the wind and surf had risen to such an extent, that it was impossible to re-embark, and Coote entrenched his force in the sandhills near the coast, to wait until the weather moderated. However, before it was possible to embark, he was attacked by the enemy in great force, and eventually, after a gallant defence against overwhelming odds, his force had to capitulate, he himself being severely wounded. Nevertheless the object was achieved, and had a very heartening effect in England, the people on the southern coast being obsessed with the fear of invasion.

After the disembarkation of the Seventh Division at Zeebrugge in October, 1914, I suggested that before we abandoned the harbour, on the approach of German forces, we should destroy the lock gates of the Bruges Canal, but was informed that our army would require Zeebrugge, when we reoccupied the Belgian coast.

The first proposal to block Zeebrugge and Ostend in the Great War, appears to have been made by Admiral Bayly, who had always advocated the capture and occupation of Borkum. In November, 1916, he strongly urged an attack on the Belgian ports, so as to "neutralise them as nests for destroyers and submarines." He declared that a combined naval and military operation would be necessary to achieve the object. No action was taken on this proposal.

A few days later Commodore Tyrwhitt submitted a paper to the Admiralty on the subject of the destruction of Zeebrugge locks by a blockship—under cover of bombardment, smoke and poisoned gas. After a discussion at the Admiralty, in which the Vice-Admiral of the Dover Patrol—Admiral Bacon—took part, Commodore Tyrwhitt submitted, on 8th January, 1917, a more detailed proposal, and after a further discussion, it was decided not to carry out Commodore Tyrwhitt's project, but, as proposed by Admiral Bacon, to train coastal motor

boats to torpedo the lock gates! (These papers were then locked in a safe in the Admiralty, from which they did not emerge until February, 1919.)

Commodore Tyrwhitt, undeterred by this rebuff, submitted a further scheme on 7th May, 1917, the objectives of which were :

(a) Capture of Zeebrugge Mole by assault and the occupation of Zeebrugge.

(b) Using Zeebrugge as a base for military operation against Antwerp, with the ultimate intention of turning the German flank.

The *coup de main* was to be covered by a smoke-screen, followed by a gas-screen. Commodore Tyrwhitt gave the credit for this idea to Wing-Commander F. A. Brock, R.N.A.S. The scheme was sent to Vice-Admiral Bacon for remarks.

On 17th May, he reported that as a military operation the scheme was impracticable, but as a raid, merely to seize the Mole and raid the locks, and then retire, the operation was worth considering, but he doubted the probability of the raiding force reaching the lock gates, and considered that even if the Mole was seized, little advantage would accrue. The value of using gas he considered doubtful, owing to the tactical difficulties.

Admiral Bacon further considered that bombardment gave the greatest chance of success against the lock gates.

With his reply, he enclosed notes of a scheme prepared by him 18 months previously, which he said had been discussed with Sir Henry Jackson, Sir Henry Oliver and Sir Arthur Wilson, and abandoned, as not worth the risk entailed by the vessels and personnel, and with this decision he still concurred.

On the 3rd December, the Staff appreciation and an outline plan were completed. It was believed that 28 destroyers and torpedo-boats, and 38 submarines, were based on Bruges, Zeebrugge and Ostend, and could pass between those ports, by way of the inland canals via Bruges. Thus there was a good case for blocking the entrances to the Bruges Canal at Zeebrugge and Ostend. It was thought that small submarines

could be transported to Antwerp on barges, via the canals through Bruges and Ghent, but if the suggested blocking operation was carried out, a number of valuable vessels would be lost to the enemy, so long as the harbours remained closed. The destroyers based on Bruges and Zeebrugge were a continual menace to our shipping in the Downs, and our patrol craft in the Dover Straits. The removal of this menace would release many of our destroyers at Dover, which would then be able to take a more active part in anti-submarine work.

The possible reasons for not blocking these ports were examined and discussed. Salvage and dockyard authorities had been consulted, and the report went fully into details both for preventing salvage, or alternatively—in the event of it being considered likely that we might reoccupy the ports shortly—to facilitate salvage. We had interviewed two Belgians who had been working in the only large dredger at Zeebrugge, and who had managed to escape to Holland in their boat, with the help of a strong east-going tide, during a dark, foggy night. They gave valuable information as to the existing depth of water, and declared that, since the German occupation, the silting and loss of harbour efficiency was considerable, due to a lack of sufficient dredging. It might therefore be expected that the silting in the vicinity of the sunken ships would help to complete the blocking.

It was suggested that the *Essex*, *Hermione* and *Sappho* should be used for blocking Zeebrugge, or failing them, three similar cruisers; and that they should endeavour to sink themselves inside the extremities of the piers forming the entrances to the canal.

The other vessels required for escort, sweepers, piloting and smoke-making were enumerated, and the methods of making smoke were gone into. The effect of wind, weather, light and visibility; the route and methods of approach; aerial co-operation, etc., were all discussed.

Similar information was given for the blocking of Ostend, for which three cruisers were also suggested. It was recommended that the blocking of the two ports should be simultaneous, the difference of high water being only 40 minutes.

The paper was, in fact, a Staff appreciation, which could not fail to be of value to an Admiral, charged with the execution

of the operation, and determined to carry it out; for above all it advanced every possible argument, to overcome the objections which had been raised by Sir John Jellicoe and his predecessor Sir Henry Jackson, the Chief of Staff, and Admiral Bacon himself, against delivering a real offensive attack on Zeebrugge and Ostend.

I forwarded it, through Admiral Wemyss, to the First Sea Lord the same day, 3rd December, with the following minute:

“It is understood that a detailed plan for blocking Ostend was drawn up and practised with vessels which are still available.

No record of this plan apparently exists in the Admiralty, but it is believed the general idea was for a light cruiser to tow two blockships alongside, all three ships being forced into the entrance of the harbour.

It was intended the light cruiser should then go astern and withdraw, and it was hoped the blockships would swing across the entrance to the harbour.

This scheme is most ingenious, but has the disadvantage that the rate of approach must be slow, and any damage to the towing hawsers by gunfire, will jeopardise the success of the operation.\*

For these reasons, an alternative scheme has been proposed for blocking Ostend, in which the blockships approach singly and at their maximum speed.

Should it be approved to carry out the proposed blocking operations, the officer in charge would probably have a decided preference for one scheme or the other.

It is understood that the original scheme, referred to above, was abandoned owing to the possibility of an

\* I learnt later all about this amazing project, from the officer who was appointed to command the *Apollo*—the cruiser in question—and the two blockships. He actually handled the trio in the Swin in the autumn of 1915. The *Apollo*, he told me, was to steam into Ostend stern first, not as stated above. There is another account in “The Dover Patrol, 1915-1917,” page 264, in which Admiral Bacon states: “The ships were prepared and the arrangements tried in the Swin at the entrance of the Thames, but when near completion, the proposals for landing troops in Ostend led to the postponement of the operation.” I think this was fortunate, and the project was evidently finally abandoned, as Admiral Bacon did not revive this scheme for blocking Ostend, when describing his plan at the Admiralty on 18th December, 1917.

early advance by the Army along the coast ; and also because it was considered easy for the enemy to cut away the upper portions of the blockships sufficiently to allow submarines to pass over them at high tide. Recent events have, however, entirely altered the military situation, and an advance in Flanders may be deferred for some months.

The possibility of cutting away the upper works of ships by acetylene plant has been carefully considered, and is a very formidable undertaking, particularly when the obstruction has to be removed down to the level of *low water*.

There are reasonable grounds for hoping that the passage of submarines through the Straits of Dover will be made very hazardous in the course of the next few months, but in the meantime it is urgently necessary to restrict operations of the Flanders submarine flotillas, in every way possible and as soon as possible.

The military authorities may raise objections to the blocking of Zeebrugge and Ostend, as it is understood they rely on the use of these ports, particularly Ostend, when they make their advance.

It is not considered, however, that these objections, should they be put forward, should be allowed to carry much weight, as before the enemy evacuate these ports, *they are certain* to block them with concrete filled ships.

The enclosed proposals have not advocated the use of concrete filled ships, on account of the difficulty of removing them, and the time taken to prepare them.

As, however, the enemy will almost certainly fill our ships with concrete, to render their removal more difficult, *we* might as well do it, if the time taken to prepare the ships can be reduced.

At first sight, the blocking operations may be regarded, particularly at Zeebrugge, as a hazardous enterprise ; but I feel very strongly that we shall not be asking the personnel engaged to take any greater risks, than the infantry and tank personnel are subjected to, on every occasion on which an attack is delivered on shore.

A call for volunteers for such an operation would produce hundreds of officers and men. The necessity for

secrecy would not permit of this, but there should be no difficulty in selecting suitable officers, who similarly would be able to select men eager to take part in such an enterprise.

(Signed) ROGER KEYES,

3.12.17.

D. of P. "

Learning on 6th December from Admiral Wemyss that he had not received it, I went in search, and found that it had drifted into another channel, and "had been sent down to the Admiral at Dover, for report by a Committee of officers of his command, who had practical experience on the Belgian coast, as to the feasibility of the operation."

Admiral Wemyss and I were both furious, and he minuted a duplicate copy for me to take to the First Sea Lord. "It was not," he wrote, "a case for asking the opinion of a Committee of officers. If the Admiralty consented to the proposal, the Admiral at Dover *only* should be consulted, and ordered to carry it out. Secrecy was absolutely imperative for the success of such an undertaking. He suggested that the Vice-Admiral at Dover should be immediately informed by wire or telephone, that the paper was for his personal inspection only, and should be returned with his remarks as soon as possible."

Armed with this, I went at once to Admiral Jellicoe, who entirely agreed, and in my presence, telephoned to Admiral Bacon to ask him to return the papers at once. He replied that he would bring them to London in the course of a day or two. I then discussed the whole project with Admiral Jellicoe, who was very interested, and expressed his approval of the proposal to block Zeebrugge and Ostend; and said that as soon as we had received Admiral Bacon's remarks, we could get on with the preparations.

In a book published in the autumn of 1919, Admiral Bacon told us that he felt that: "It was highly desirable to have some operation to compensate officers and men for the one that had missed fire" (i.e. the great landing on the Belgian coast). He had prepared a plan to capture Zeebrugge Mole by assault, and bombard the lock gates from a monitor lying alongside the Mole. "This scheme," he said, "was submitted to the First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe, on 4th December, and he

generally approved of it, but suggested combining it with a blocking operation. I pointed out that, of course, a blocking operation was a farce, so far as sealing the port against the ingress of destroyers and submarines was concerned. . . . The blocking ships were of course useless for closing the harbour—a passage could be dredged round them.”\*

Sir John Jellicoe never mentioned Admiral Bacon’s proposed scheme, then or subsequently, and indeed it is difficult to believe that he would have sanctioned the risking of some hundreds of lives in such a hazardous enterprise, if the Admiral who was to conduct it considered “that a blocking operation was a farce.”

\* “The Dover Patrol, 1915-1917,” by Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, pages 270 and 276.

## CHAPTER XI

### ANTI-SUBMARINE CAMPAIGN

Extension of deep minefield; Patrol and illumination of mined area recommended; Rejected by Bacon; Submarines continue to stream through Straits; Bacon summoned to Admiralty; He submits his Zeebrugge Plan; Ordered to patrol and illuminate minefield; Submarine destroyed by new measures; Visit to Scapa; Sir John Jellicoe succeeded by Sir Rosslyn Wemyss.

IN the meantime we had been anxiously waiting for offensive action against enemy submarines to commence in the Dover Straits. I had forwarded a copy of the Channel Barrage Committee's report to the First Sea Lord, with a proposal that the mining, concurred in by Admiral Bacon, should be authorised at once; a start being made with the extension of the deep minefield. Suitable light vessels, and searchlights for Folkestone and Cape Gris Nez, should be provided as soon as possible.

Admiral Bacon had suggested that the great barges, which worked the cross-Channel traffic from Richborough, might be bulged against torpedo attack and used as light vessels. This proposal was being considered by the Director of Naval Construction; and in conclusion I urged again, that pending the provision of searchlights and special ships, the deep minefields should be illuminated by Brock's flares, and the searchlights of patrol vessels.

During my interview with Admiral Jellicoe on 6th December, he referred to this, and approved of a telegram being sent to Admiral Bacon to inquire what steps had been taken to institute day and night patrols.

The reply received on the 7th December was very unsatisfactory, and it was obvious that Admiral Bacon had no intention of exposing any vessels under his command to possible attack from enemy vessels based on the Belgian coast. I felt I had no choice but to fight an action, for what I regarded as essential to the conduct of the anti-submarine campaign, and ultimate victory. In a Plans Division memorandum, which I submitted



on 8th December, I pointed out that Admiral Bacon's telegram disclosed a very unsatisfactory state of affairs, in view of the great activity of the enemy submarines in the Channel and Irish Sea ; in fact large and small submarines continued to pass to and from their field of operations, through the Straits of Dover, without any apparent inconvenience.

We had very definite information as to their procedure ; that the barrage was entirely ineffective could no longer be denied ; anti-submarine measures in the Straits were therefore confined to actions by patrol craft ; but there was no effective patrol by night or day.

I referred to our unsuccessful efforts to persuade Admiral Bacon to carry out an anti-submarine operation, for which 20 drifters and large quantities of mined nets had been provided. It was clear now that the Admiral had no intention of using searchlights or flares. When he proposed the construction of special vessels to carry searchlights and guns, and the placing of searchlights on shore, he had declared that : " If the matter is energetically dealt with, there is no reason that the passage of submarine boats should not be practically denied in two months from this date." I was strongly of the opinion that if he had acted reasonably and energetically, when he was informed early in October, that submarines were passing through the Straits, without suffering any inconvenience, a few of those which were known to have passed through, during the last two months, would have been destroyed, and losses in the Channel would have been considerably reduced. Also had the proposals for illuminating and patrolling the deep minefield, as soon as it was laid, been accepted and put into force, there would have been some chance of driving enemy submarines down on to the mines. The deep mines were, however, laid on the 21st November, and it was only now, on the 8th December, in reply to an urgent Admiralty telegram, that steps were being taken to institute a night patrol, and a quite inadequate one at that ; moreover he still had no intention of using lights or flares.

The memorandum concluded by making very definite proposals for the action, which it was considered the Vice-Admiral ought to be ordered to take. I followed this up a few days later, by calling attention to the fact that during the

past six weeks the necessity for instituting an efficient patrol had been repeatedly brought to the notice of the Vice-Admiral at Dover. Up to the present, no adequate steps had been taken, and enemy submarines continued to stream through the Straits. The northern route appeared to have been almost abandoned, and consequently our losses were proportionately increased, owing to the longer time the submarines could spend on their hunting ground. During the period 1st November-9th December, it was definitely known by the Naval Intelligence Department, that 35 German submarines had passed through the Straits, and from evidence in their possession, they considered that another 15 submarines had made the passage.

The measures which the Admiral proposed were so inadequate, that the Admiralty must either order certain action to be carried out and accept the responsibility; or they must accept the still greater responsibility, of knowing that the Vice-Admiral's plans were inadequate to deal with a situation, which was vitally affecting our power to carry on the War. It could hardly be questioned that, if the Admiralty had not been lulled into a false sense of security, by Admiral Bacon's claim that submarines were *not* passing through the Straits, steps would have been taken many months ago to deal with the unsatisfactory situation; which enabled the enemy to attack our trade in the Channel and the Irish Sea by a short and practically safe route. I submitted that the strongest measures possible *were necessary* and that time was passing.

On 13th December, Sir John Jellicoe told me to send Captain Fuller down to Dover to see Admiral Bacon, and find out what his proposals were for the attack on Zeebrugge and Ostend; as he had not yet returned the Plans paper, nor forwarded any report.

Captain Fuller reported that Admiral Bacon proposed to visit the Admiralty with his plan in a few days, and in the meantime, had given him the following outline of it:

The operation was to be carried out at night, under cover of smoke-screens; a preliminary bombardment by monitors would be delivered on the batteries to the east of Zeebrugge, the batteries to the west of the Mole would be left alone, in order to deceive the Germans as to our real

intentions. The blockships should be of the "Blanche" class, as speed was essential. Two monitors were destined to attack the Mole, one to be fitted with a collapsible bow, which was to ram the Mole bows on, on the seaward side. A gangboard would then be dropped over the parapet of the Mole, and the attacking troops, 900 strong, would disembark from the monitor. The other monitor would go alongside the Mole, and the charges of the 12-inch and six-inch guns would be adjusted, with the object of bombarding the lock gates of the Bruges Canal and the batteries at the shore end of the Mole. These two monitors would make for the outside of the Mole about a third of the way from its eastern extremity; the troops would capture the guns on the eastern extremity of the Mole and by means of trench mortars would sink the destroyers alongside the Mole. They would erect leading lights for the blockships, and hold as much of the Mole as possible, while the operation was in progress.

Admiral Bacon's plan was in fact a combination, and an ingenious development, of the operations which Commodore Tyrwhitt had so persistently urged in November, 1916, and January and May, 1917, but which had been turned down on Admiral Bacon's advice.

Fuller also reported that it was quite certain, from what Admiral Bacon had told him, that anti-submarine measures in the Straits would have to wait until the special vessels and searchlights were provided.

I reported the outcome of Fuller's visit to Dover to Sir John Jellicoe, called his attention to the Plans memoranda and asked for a decision, which he gave the same evening.

He was not, he wrote, prepared to accept my sweeping indictment. The Vice-Admiral's dispositions were based on experience, not only of submarine actions, but of destroyer attacks, and he was naturally reluctant to ignore the latter, in an attempt to deal with the former. However it was indisputable that the barrage was not effective against submarines, and some risks in regard to destroyers, etc., must be run, in order to cope with the submarine menace. Admiral Bacon was to be given the latest information as to the number of enemy submarines that

had passed through the Straits, and was to be informed that: "The submarines were to be regarded as the greatest menace we had to face. All other considerations must give way to combating this menace, and to denying the Straits of Dover to the enemy submarines; in addition to this, it was of course of the first importance to destroy as many of them as possible in the process. In order to carry out this policy, it was essential that the attention of the Dover Force should, for the present, be mainly directed to anti-submarine measures, and, to provide the strong patrols necessary for the purpose, the Belgian coast barrage, and if necessary, the Goodwin-Dunkirk barrage must be discontinued. Patrol craft were to be provided in sufficient numbers, in the vicinity of the deep minefield, to force every enemy submarine that attempted to pass it, to dive into the minefield." He was also to be told that the dispositions given in his last report, were not considered adequate for the purpose, and the number must be largely increased; that the use of a very large number of drifters and patrol boats in the vicinity of the deep minefield, would necessitate a strong destroyer force, to safeguard them from attack by enemy destroyers based on Zeebrugge; and pending the provision of the proposed boom vessels fitted with searchlights, it was considered necessary for the patrol boats and destroyers to use their searchlights intermittently, the drifters using flares.

Finally, the Vice-Admiral was also to be informed that these arrangements were to be put in force at the earliest possible moment; and he was to be requested to forward his scheme of patrol at a very early date, reporting at the same time, to what extent it would be necessary to abandon the existing barrages.

A definite order on the lines of Admiral Jellicoe's minute was dispatched on the 14th December, and this implemented all the proposals contained in the Plans memoranda I had submitted.

On the 15th December, Admiral Bacon replied in a long letter, setting out the difficulties of carrying out the policy ordered, so he was summoned to the Admiralty. He came on the 18th December, and a meeting was held in the First Sea Lord's room, which was attended by Admirals Jellicoe, Wemyss, Oliver, Hope, and myself.

Admiral Bacon was asked a number of questions, in regard to his letter of the 15th December. He had declared that the disposition of the modern destroyers supporting the patrol line, was governed by two factors : the necessity of placing them in a position in which they would not be silhouetted against the searchlights, and where they would not be open to torpedo attack by coastal motor boats. He was asked what grounds he had for supposing that the enemy had torpedo-carrying coastal motor boats. He replied that one night recently, one of our submarines, east of the Goodwins, heard a fast running motor boat in her vicinity. She promptly dived to the bottom, and heard the motor-boat cruising above her for some time. It was suggested that the disposition of destroyers, engaged on such important service as the protection of a large number of patrol craft, should not be influenced by the fear of vessels which might not even exist ; and in any case, modern destroyers under way had little to fear from a small motor boat ; further that such risk, if it existed, should be faced, in view of the importance of maintaining a proper patrol.

Admiral Bacon wished to lay a shallow minefield to the east of the deep minefield, to catch enemy submarines which might attempt to pass through the patrol with their conning towers awash. This was agreed to, provided that it was well marked, and that it would not, under any circumstances, prevent the effective patrolling of the deep minefield, which was regarded as of paramount importance.

Admiral Bacon told us that he did not propose to abandon the Belgian coast, Dover Straits, nor Goodwin net barrages. He was told that there was no objection to his maintaining the latter, as its situation made it practically safe from interference on the part of the enemy ; but that the other two could be destroyed whenever the enemy wished to do so, and their retention did not seem to be justified, if this entailed the employment of drifters and patrol craft, which would be better engaged patrolling the deep minefield.

He said that he had no objection to the use of searchlights and flares, provided that they were not burnt until a submarine was seen or heard. It was explained to him that there was no objection to this, provided the area was so thickly patrolled, that there was every prospect of an enemy submarine suddenly

finding herself illuminated, and being forced to dive deep in a hurry.

After hearing all Admiral Bacon had to say, Admiral Jellicoe told him that the deep minefield was to be patrolled night and day, and illuminated as directed in the Admiralty letter of 14th December. Admiral Bacon undertook to put these new measures into force the following day.

He was then asked to tell us all about his plan for blocking Zeebrugge and Ostend, the outline of which he had given Captain Fuller (*see* page 137). He was now in his element, and we were all struck with the ingenuity of the special arrangements which were to be built into a 12-inch monitor—the false bow, which was to crush when the monitor rammed the Mole; the great hinged brow, 80 feet long, which was to drop over the parapet, span the footpath and slope down on to the Mole; the special charges for the guns of the other monitor, which were to give the exact range of the lock gates. Admiral Bacon believed that this form of attack would be the most effective, but overlooked the fact that as a blocking operation must necessarily take place near high water, the lock gates would be run in under their massive concrete shelters, directly an attack threatened.

The suggestion to assault the Mole from its seaward side was brilliant. I had examined Tyrwhitt's plan of May, 1917, and thought that the assault from inside would be a very hazardous proceeding, but from the outside it would be unsuspected, and might well be a complete surprise.

I had spent many hours on the Mole in October, 1914, had seen the tide surging along its seaward side, and could only picture a vulnerable, unhandy monitor, waddling into that fierce tideway and hornet's nest of powerful batteries, at a speed of five or six knots at the most, possibly less, encumbered as she would be by the false bow and the great weight of the structure forward. At that speed, she would be within close range of all the batteries which commanded the approach for more than an hour. Apart from the risk to the assaulting force, a lucky shot might well send the great brow tumbling over the bows before she reached the Mole, or destroy the means of lifting it, after it had been dropped over the parapet; though no doubt Admiral Bacon would have

devised some means of shedding the brow, like a lizard does its tail.

I had seen a side of modern war which Admiral Bacon had been spared, and I felt very strongly that his monitor assault on the Mole was akin to his Great Landing on the Belgian coast, and the blocking of Ostend by a cruiser and two merchantmen, fearfully ingenious, perhaps feasible as a peacetime exercise, under the most favourable weather conditions, but utterly impracticable in the face of the opposition which would be encountered, under the conditions of modern war which I had witnessed. I expressed my opinion very freely at this conference.

However, as I made clear in my covering minute to the Plans Staff appreciation, the Admiral to whom the command would be confided, must be given a free hand; and this was accorded to Admiral Bacon by Sir John Jellicoe, with two exceptions.

Admiral Bacon had said that we must borrow an infantry battalion from the Army. He said it was necessary to employ men experienced in trench raiding; bluejackets and marines, having no experience, would be unsuitable.

I warmly protested, and said it would be an insult to the Navy to ask the Army to provide the men for such a hazard. In my opinion, the men from the Fleet would be spoiling to emulate the deeds of their brothers in the Army, they could be specially trained, long before the construction Admiral Bacon contemplated could be completed, and they would be splendid people for such an enterprise.

Sir John Jellicoe supported me, and authorised me to go up to Scapa Flow, to ask Sir David Beatty to lend men from the Grand Fleet. He also told me to prepare a list of old cruisers which could be used as blockships, as the "Blanche" class, for which Admiral Bacon had asked, could not be spared from service in the North Sea.

No mention was made at this meeting of the plan which Admiral Bacon says (in his book) he forwarded to Sir John Jellicoe on the 4th December, and the possibility of a passage being dredged round the end of the blockships was not suggested. Had it been, I would have proposed that the blockships should ram the lock gates, or sink themselves in the lock itself, if the gates, as was probable, had been run back under their concrete shelters,

Admiral Bacon went back to Dover that afternoon, having returned the Plans appreciation without any comment, written or verbal. Indeed he can hardly have troubled to look at it, and he certainly can have taken no note of its contents, judging by the description in his book, which bears no resemblance to that document, from which I have quoted, and which is now in the Historical Archives.

On the morning of 20th December, we heard that during the previous night, the patrol over the deep minefield, though still very inadequate in numbers, had used flares and search-lights for the first time, with the result that a German submarine (identified later as *U59*) had been forced to dive hurriedly, and had been blown up on a mine.

This was a great stroke of good fortune for Plans Division. The odds were all in favour of the submarine getting through unscathed, as the patrol vessels were a considerable distance apart; and the minefield, which had been lying idle for a month—there being no inducement for the enemy to enter it—had been rapidly deteriorating, a number of mines having broken adrift in the winter gales. However *U59* provided an overwhelming argument in support of the policy Plans Division had so insistently urged, and Sir Reginald Bacon had so strenuously resisted. *U59* actually sealed Admiral Bacon's fate, for the First Lord—Sir Eric Geddes—had been watching the battle about the Dover Straits with the keenest interest.

It was in fact, a struggle between two schools of naval thought, which are really quite irreconcilable in war. On the one hand the *Matériel* School, whose outlook could be summed up in the phrase I heard when I joined the Grand Fleet: "If we never leave the Flow, we win the War." Admiral Bacon was one of the chief exponents of this school; having suffered severely from enemy raids in the past, he had no intention of risking any of his vessels in another; and had continued to rely on physical obstructions, long after they had been proved to be utterly ineffective.

On the other hand was a school which welcomed the help of every possible scientific or physical aid, but knew that to make them operative, ships and men must be employed, and risks must be faced. In land warfare, trenches and barbed wire were in themselves no obstacle, it was the people who



manned them, who denied the country behind them to an enemy. The issue on land would be decided by Thomas Atkins and the young officers who led him so gallantly, and their endurance and bravery would carry us to ultimate victory—if the Navy could safeguard the sea communications, on which the Army's existence and the very life of the country depended. But in our long maritime history, Great Britain had never had to face a greater menace to her sea communications than the enemy's ruthless submarine campaign of 1917-18. It is on record that Sir John Jellicoe stated categorically at a War Cabinet meeting on 19th June, 1917, that unless the Flanders coast was captured before the winter, and we cleared the Germans out of Zeebrugge, we should not be able to go on with the War next year, through lack of shipping.

Hence the military campaign of 1917 to capture the Belgian coast was persisted in, but ended so disastrously in the mud on Passchendaele Ridge. I felt so passionately that the capture of the Flanders bases by the Army was not essential, that the Navy could and should overcome the submarine menace, and that the issue would be decided, as of old, by the endurance and bravery of British seamen—not by passive physical defences, such as those which had been relied upon for the last two and a half years in the Straits of Dover, the principal gateway of our sea communications.

In Lord Fisher—the Arch Priest of the *Matériel* School—and Winston Churchill—whose whole outlook on war was vigorously offensive—we had had a wonderful combination, if they could only have worked in harmony at the Admiralty. But after their departure in May, 1915, all offensive spirit seemed to have fled from the Board of Admiralty, and it was fearfully difficult to revive it. When Sir Eric Geddes was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, he was definitely charged by the War Cabinet to do so.

I left for Scapa Flow that evening (20th December) and stayed for some hours on board the *Queen Elizabeth*. Sir David promised to lend officers and men for the attack on Zeebrugge and Ostend, of which he thoroughly approved.

On my return Admiral Wemyss told me that Sir Eric Geddes had sent for Admiral Bacon, who had weathered the storm

that was brewing, by promising to continue to illuminate the deep minefield, and patrol it more densely day and night.

It soon appeared, however, that as he insisted on maintaining the useless barrages, he would have insufficient vessels to do so.

In the meantime, the Channel Barrage Committee submitted what proved to be its final report. Professors Bragg and McLennan had made great progress. It was decided to establish an experimental station for them on the Clyde, where the depth of water was approximately the same as that in the Channel. While preparations were being made, however, the professors carried out some experiments at Aberdour, on the Firth of Forth, where we had an experimental hydrophone station. They laid their indicator loops across the Forth, and were much worried for some days by unaccountable electrical interference, which commenced early every morning and went on until late at night ; then followed a peaceful time, when everything worked according to plan. They eventually discovered that the electric tram system running from Edinburgh to Leith, many miles away, was the cause of the trouble. When the trams ceased to run, all was well. The professors were able to prove that the detector or indicating loops gave definite indication of vessels passing over them.

The obvious outcome of this was, that the entry of a vessel into a controlled minefield could be detected by surrounding it with indicating loops.\* This revived the idea of the concrete towers, which had been dropped, as it was felt that the expense of building them could not be justified, if they were only to act as searchlight platforms to illuminate the mined areas.

The Committee recommended that the proposals in their interim report, as to the extension of the deep minefield, its patrol and illumination, and the laying of an explosive surface obstruction (when it could be developed), should be applied at the earliest possible moment, to bar the channel between Folkestone and Gris Nez. The surface obstruction should be well to the eastward of the minefield, in order not to interfere with the patrol above it. We also recommended that ships carrying searchlights should be moored at intervals, two miles apart,

\* The mines in the deep minefield exploded on contact, those in a controlled minefield would be on an electric circuit, and could be exploded by an operator at a distance of about two miles, when a hostile vessel was known to be within the danger zone.

across the Channel ; that indicating loops should be laid to the eastward and westward of the patrolled areas, with observation stations in France and England ; and that mined detector loops should be laid in the channels used by our trade along the British and French coasts.

Our professors had also made considerable progress in the design of a magnetic ground mine, and if this matured we recommended these should be laid in certain channels in which the soundings did not exceed 15 fathoms. The mined detector loops had immense possibilities, and we recommended that the building of towers from which to operate them should be seriously considered. We were advised that ten towers would cost under £500,000 and could be completed within six months, so we had arranged for a detailed design to be prepared at once. We thought that a barrage, on the lines we had recommended, might be completely effective without the towers ; but a combination of towers and mined loops promised to make a simple, absolute and easily maintained barrier, in all conditions of weather, and would thus release a great many patrol vessels for anti-submarine work elsewhere ; for this reason we felt that the expenditure would be justified.

The sole responsibility for defeating the submarine menace rested on the Board of Admiralty, not on any individual Admiral ; and we concluded our recommendation by reiterating an opinion, expressed in our interim report, despite the adverse criticism it had aroused, on the score that it was opposed to service procedure and custom :

“In order to insure the success of any barrage scheme across the Channel, the construction, maintenance, defence and patrol of the same, should be under the control of an officer, who should be solely and directly responsible to the Admiralty for all matters relating thereto.”

In other words, if the Admiral at Dover was not prepared to carry out measures which the Admiralty considered necessary, they would have to change the Admiral, since there could not of course be two responsible naval authorities in one area, and the situation was far too serious and urgent to stand on any ceremony or precedent.

Admiral Wemyss' Memoirs relating to that period have recently been published by his widow, and disclose what actually occurred during those difficult days.\*

It is evident that Sir Eric Geddes was in no mood to tolerate any half-measures in the Dover Straits, but all that we were told at the time was, that he had suggested to Sir John Jellicoe—who had borne immense responsibilities for over three years—that it was time he took a rest.

On Christmas Eve, Sir Rosslyn Wemyss was appointed First Sea Lord. He immediately went up to the Grand Fleet to confer with Sir David Beatty, and we understood that there would be a good many flag changes. I hoped that fate would take me back to the Grand Fleet.

\* "The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wemyss, Admiral of the Fleet," by Lady Wester Wemyss. Pages 364-7.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE INVASION BOGY

Naval and Military Conference ; Report on invasion possibilities ; Appointed to command Dover Patrol.

WHILE the battle for the closing of the Dover Straits had been raging, I had been actively engaged in another—to try to kill the invasion bogey, and here I found stalwart allies in Major-General F. B. Maurice, the Director of Military Operations at the War Office, and Rear-Admiral W. R. Hall ; the latter told me that he had always considered the risk of invasion as negligible, and in any case, he could be certain of getting five days' notice before the expedition sailed from Germany.

I examined records of previous conferences on the subject of raids and invasion, and found a sentence in an official record of a meeting held in January, 1913, which served as a text for my plea for the whole matter to be reconsidered.

“Circumstances may arise in which every regular soldier in the country may be urgently required for service overseas. In such an event, it will be for the Government of the day to decide at what point the greatest risks are to be run.”

In coming to a declaration on this point, I said, it would clearly be necessary to consider *probabilities* and not only *certainities* and *unlikely possibilities*.

On 3rd November, under cover of this minute, I submitted the memorandum which I had written, when I was in the Grand Fleet, on the report of a naval and military conference held in the War Office on 16th March, 1917 (*see* page 102). This went through Admiral Wemyss in the first instance, and led to some correspondence between him and General Maurice, and eventually Admiral Wemyss directed me to nominate officers to confer with an officer of the General Staff, in order to investigate and report on the following points :

The largest number of ships which were likely to sail in one convoy from the German ports, taking into consideration the facilities for embarking and the navigational difficulties on the way across the North Sea.

The average number of men that the ships were likely to carry over the short distance.

The various beaches on the East Coast which were likely to be used, their landing facilities, navigational difficulties of approach, etc.

The chances of their being interrupted, or attacked by naval action other than the Grand Fleet.

Whether two or more beaches and an equal number of convoys could be used simultaneously.

This small committee reported very fully, and a conference was held at which the Admiralty were represented by Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, Rear-Admiral George Hope (Director of Operations) and myself. The War Office was represented by Major-General F. B. Maurice and Colonel W. Kirke, and the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces by his Chief of Staff—Major-General Sir F. Shaw.\*

The Conference examined the conclusions arrived at on previous occasions, and, in the light of the most recent information and practical experience gained in the handling of large convoys, came to the following conclusions, which they signed on 17th December, 1917.

In view of the amount of preparation required, the size of the convoy, and the length of the sea voyage, warning of an attempted invasion would be obtained, thus enabling the necessary dispositions to be taken.

The difficulties of assembling and moving the number of ships required to transport 160,000 men, within the time which would be at the enemy's disposal, were so great as to be practically insuperable.

Although an absolute guarantee could not be given against the arrival of one convoy—maximum size 32 ships—the Conference considered that it would be impossible

\* General Shaw commanded the 13th Division at Anzac.

for subsequent convoys to reach our shores, without such action on our part as would ensure the complete failure of the expedition.

The maximum force with which the land forces might have to deal was therefore limited to that which could be carried in one such convoy, i.e. 30,000 men, with a strictly limited proportion of transports and artillery.

The experience at Gallipoli, when the naval conditions were exceptionally favourable, had shown the very limited effect of naval gunfire upon entrenchments, and had demonstrated the impossibility of effecting a landing on an open beach, which was adequately protected with barbed wire, and covered by fire from the land from well-sited and suitably arranged entrenchments.

The paper also dealt with the possibility of raids in various localities and the scale on which they might be delivered.

After he had signed his name, General Shaw looked up at me and remarked with a laugh, that there were lots of lamp-posts in Whitehall. I said I for one was content to risk the chance of swinging from a lamp-post, if the paper we had just signed would result in releasing 100,000 men to reinforce the Army abroad. I think we all felt that we had done a good day's work, but the result at the moment was disappointing, as the Admiralty and the General Staff of the War Office were not ready to take the responsibility of fully endorsing our declaration.

While Sir Rosslyn Wemyss was still away, I was able to submit (on the 27th December) the result of our investigations as to the cruisers available to act as blockships. Everything in connection with the operation was camouflaged at that time, and the various authorities consulted were told, that six old cruisers were required for blocking those portions of the channel into Scapa Flow, which were not already closed. The ships were to be capable of steaming 15 knots and had to fulfil other requirements. We found that eight old cruisers could be spared, without great inconvenience to any important service. An immediate decision was asked for as regards the *Vindictive* and *Sirius*, which were about to undergo extensive repairs, to fit them for further active service. Later Admiral Wemyss

approved of the *Thetis*, *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, *Brilliant*, *Sirius* and *Vindictive* being used. There was no suggestion at that time, or indeed for some weeks later, of the *Vindictive* being used as anything but a blockship at Ostend.\*

When Sir Rosslyn Wemyss returned to the Admiralty on the morning of the 28th December, he sent for me and said: "Well Roger, you have talked a hell of a lot about what ought to be done in the Dover area, and now you must go and do it."

This was rather a shock, for I had done everything in my power to put an end to the passive resistance at Dover, which was having such a disastrous effect on British shipping, and it seemed hardly decent that I should be sent to fill the vacancy, which my relentless efforts had caused—moreover it was a great surprise. Before Admiral Wemyss went north, I had been told that a certain senior Vice-Admiral was to be appointed, and I knew that Captain Boyle of the *Malaya* (who had proved his worth at Anzac) would be appointed his Chief of Staff. I told Admiral Wemyss that Admiral Bacon was, at that moment, in the anteroom of my office, interviewing the two Belgians from the Zeebrugge dredger, whom the Director of Naval Intelligence had procured for us.

Admiral Bacon was then sent for by Sir Eric Geddes, and came back to my room, apparently quite unperturbed and as friendly as ever. He said he thought the change had better take place at once. Could I come down to Dover the following day? I felt so fearfully sorry for him, and greatly admired the way he took his knock. History had repeated itself with a vengeance, Hood had been superseded by Admiral Bacon just as ruthlessly, and I wondered if a similar fate awaited me.

We had taken a house in London for six months, and my family had only been settled in it a few weeks. My wife—who had been helping to pack parcels for prisoners of war—was about to start work in the Naval Intelligence Department under my friend Reggie Hall, as she knew German, but of course this had to be given up as we were going to Dover. We decided that we would leave the children in London for the time being, and would try to find a house for them in the country somewhere near Dover, out of the air raid area; not that the air raids

\* See the "Dover Patrol, 1915-1917," by Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, page 221.



bothered the children in the least. They were always in bed and asleep by the time the raids started, and my wife never moved them and they never woke up, in spite of the noise of the anti-craft guns firing close by. They only saw one of the many air raids which occurred in London, as it started at 7 p.m. while they were being put to bed, and when the roar of the anti-craft guns started, my wife told them that the noise was our guns driving the German aeroplanes away, so the more noise there was, the better pleased they were. They heard the aeroplanes and were thrilled by the searchlights and thought it all great fun, but were fast asleep by the time another raid came an hour or so later, and never woke up.

The servants who used to go down to the basement, soon adopted the same philosophic view—if a bomb was going to hit the house, it would not make much difference which part of it you were in, but the only thing to avoid were our own projectiles, and provided one was not on the top floor one was pretty safe. The corner of a parapet was broken off the next house by a dud shell, but did no other harm.

My wife was anxious to move the children into the country because of the difficulty of getting suitable food for them. In Scotland there was no shortage at that time, but when they came to London, she found it very difficult to get any fresh meat, as the butchers, only having a very limited amount, very naturally kept it for the hospitals and their old customers, and had nothing left for newcomers. There was also a great shortage of butter and all forms of fat for cooking, until the ration cards started, when at least everyone got a limited amount, which considerably eased the situation. Before this occurred, my wife used to go on foraging expeditions and see what she could collect, and came home one day in triumph with a small leg of venison she had found in a shop. On another occasion she was not so fortunate, and all she could get was some bones to make soup. She said she had been chaffed by a friend who saw her with the parcel, as the bones came through the paper while she was carrying them home. Fish was a standby, but became monotonous when it always had to be boiled, owing to lack of fat for frying, and tinned meat was not suitable for small children.

Before leaving for Dover, I went round the Admiralty to say good-bye to my friends, to whom I owed so much for their help

during my brief but stormy campaign. Reggie Hall was a great ally, and one met every kind of interesting person in his room. I hope some day a true record of his great services and his contribution to victory will be written. George Hope who had been Captain of the *Queen Elizabeth*, and was Director of Operations, succeeded Wemyss as Deputy First Sea Lord; Pound became Director of Operations; and Fuller Director of Plans; Lionel Halsey—an old shipmate and great friend—was Third Sea Lord and Controller, so I knew that I would have every possible help from the Naval Staff and the *matériel* side of the Admiralty. They all wished me the best of luck, and sent me on my way, absolutely determined to accept the risks, and overcome all the difficulties involved in the policy I had been urging, which I fully appreciated, and which Admiral Bacon foresaw so clearly and would not face.

Finally I went to say good-bye to my shrewd old friend Sir Henry Oliver, who had been given command of a battle cruiser squadron, and was delighted to be going to sea, after three strenuous years at the Admiralty. I told him how badly I felt about being appointed to supersede Admiral Bacon, and he said dryly: "Well—now it is up to you to deliver the goods."

## CHAPTER XIII

### DOVER PATROL

Take command of Dover Patrol as Acting Vice-Admiral; Interview Officers;  
Abandon old anti-submarine barrage; Institute new patrol arrangements;  
Visit units; Organise Staff; Study records of German raids.

My appointment as Acting Vice-Admiral of the Dover Patrol was dated 1st January, 1918, but I went down to Dover on the 29th December, as arranged at my interview with Admiral Bacon in London the previous day. He told me that he really had nothing to turn over to me, it was all a question of experience, and that was in his head, I would have to gain my own.

I said that the one thing I wanted to know about was smoke. I understood he burnt phosphorus in open iron pots, which made a wonderful smoke, but also generated a fierce flame. Had he any system of making smoke, suitable for night work? He took me down to the eastern arm of the breakwater to see some experiments, which were being carried out by a young R.N.V.R. Lieutenant—the technical officer on his Staff in charge of smoke apparatus. We were shown a phosphorus smoke pot with a cover and funnel attachment, which he said baffled the flame, but it appeared to me also to baffle the smoke, for very little appeared out of the funnel. I did not pursue the matter further then, but made up my mind to consult Wing-Commander Brock, who was responsible for the flares, which were to play such an important part in my anti-submarine campaign, and I was told that he would no doubt produce a smoke as efficient as that which the German ships used with such effect at Jutland.

As there was nothing more to be done at Dover, until Admiral Bacon turned over the command to me, I went back to London, and returned to Dover on the 31st, ready to take up my command the next day. Sir Reginald and Lady Bacon were very kind and hospitable, and when saying good-bye, I thanked him for having made a difficult situation pass so easily; he then let me see

what he really felt, and told me that I was all wrong and that I would soon find out my mistake—and thus we parted company.

When it became known that I had gone to Dover, I received a number of encouraging letters from naval friends. Admiral de Robeck wrote: "The best of luck to you in your new billet. I think on the whole you have the best job 'on the side'; anyway you will not be bored, and are more or less independent, and there appears so much that could be done. Well, good luck for 1918." The Commanders-in-Chief of the adjacent commands, the Nore and Portsmouth, Sir George Callaghan and Sir Stanley Colville—both of whom had helped me so greatly in training the submarines before the War (*see* Vol. I)—respectively wrote most friendly welcomes. The former said he was very glad and felt sure "that we would soon be doing something! You may, you know, rely on me for anything I can do to further the wishes of my neighbour and to co-operate with all my power." Sir Stanley Colville, in wishing me a very successful New Year, said: "Any assistance that can be given by the Portsmouth Command will be only too willingly given."

I found my headquarters consisted of three seaside lodging houses on the sea front, at the eastern end of the Marine Parade. The centre one, curiously enough, was named "Fleet House," and this was the Admiral's official residence. The house on the eastern side contained the Admiral's office and secretariat, and that on the western side the rest of the offices.

The Captain in command of the destroyer flotilla had a house a little farther down Marine Parade. The trawlers and drifters were based in the western part of the harbour, and were commanded respectively by Captains Howard and Bird, two retired "dug out" officers. Captain Evans (of the *Broke*) was Admiral Bacon's Chief of Staff. I had not met him previously, and was much impressed by his virile personality; I learnt a great deal from him as to how the patrol had been conducted, and found that he had no duties or responsibilities, which corresponded to those I had carried out, when I was Chief of Staff in the Mediterranean; or those for instance, which I had confided to my principal Staff officer, when I was head of the Submarine

Service. I gathered that Admiral Bacon did practically everything himself.

The submarine depot ship *Arrogant*, which had been attached to Fort Blockhouse, during the latter part of my submarine command, and had been towed to Dover on the outbreak of war, lay in the camber at the north-eastern end of the harbour. She flew the flag of the Vice-Admiral, and acted as parent ship to "E" class submarines and all the motor launches.

The torpedo gunboat *Hazard*, a submarine tender, in which I had flown my Commodore's broad pennant for the first time at sea, lay alongside the *Arrogant*, and she flew my first Vice-Admiral's flag on the 1st January until Admiral Bacon's flag came down in the *Arrogant* at sunset.

The dockyard, workshops, etc., were under Rear-Admiral C. Dampier, who had been a young lieutenant when I was a midshipman in the corvette *Turquoise*. He was senior to me as a Rear-Admiral, hence my appointment as an Acting Vice-Admiral, as the dockyard must necessarily be subordinate to me. He had a house in the Eastern Parade and flew his flag on shore.

The coastal motor boats, commonly known as C.M.B.s, had their workshops and slips in the dockyard, and the personnel lived in huts there.

The motor launches were under the command of Captain Graham Edwards, and Captain Ion Hamilton Benn, M.P., who occasionally took leave to attend Parliament, was the senior M.L. captain; and the C.M.B.s were under Lieutenant A. E. P. Welman, R.N.

There was also a seaplane base right alongside my house, a Royal Naval Air Station on the heights behind the Castle (near where Bleriot landed when he first flew the Channel in 1909), and a squadron of small dirigibles known as "Blimps" on the cliffs between Dover and Folkestone.

I sent for all the principal officers of the command, the day I hoisted my flag, and at once I sensed an atmosphere of hostility and resentment, which was perhaps not surprising, after the summary supersession of their chief.

I told them how desperately serious the situation was, and said, as they no doubt knew, submarines were streaming through the Straits, unhampered by the Dover Patrol anti-submarine measures, and they were inflicting terrible losses on shipping in

the Channel and its western approaches. It was absolutely necessary to take drastic steps to deny the Straits to them. To my intense surprise, Captains Bird and Howard declared that they did not believe that enemy submarines were passing through the Straits in any numbers, an opinion which was shared by all the other officers; and to support this view, they pointed out that there had been no sinking nor minelaying by submarines in the Dover Patrol area for a long time.

In the meantime I had opened the safe in the Admiral's office, the key of which Admiral Bacon had handed over to me, and had found in it the information which had been taken from *UC44*, giving the orders which German submarines received for the passage of the Straits, and all the information supplied by the Naval Intelligence Department, regarding the ceaseless and unrestricted procession of submarines.

It is no exaggeration to say that they were astounded, when confronted with this very definite evidence, and from that moment we were all united in a most determined effort to put a stop to a state of affairs, which had become nothing short of an insult to the Dover Patrol.

I told them that the futile barrages, the maintenance of which had occupied all the energies of about 100 drifters and numerous patrol craft, would now be abandoned, and the whole patrol would be concentrated above the minefield. I said that I quite recognised that even if every submarine which attempted the Straits was forced to dive, the odds were still considerably in favour of her passing above, below, or past the existing mines, but I intended to reinforce it with many more lines of mines, at varying depths, until the odds were all against the submarine. There would be no shallow mines near the deep minefield, and nothing to prevent the free passage of patrol vessels above the whole mined area. The patrol would be maintained as densely as possible, both night and day, and brilliantly illuminated with flares and searchlights throughout the night.

I gave them an outline of the other steps which would be taken, if the experiments in progress were successful, and directed them to organise their respective commands, in order to ensure the greatest possible number of vessels being available for patrol; having due regard to periods for refits and rest.

I have mentioned that Captain Boyle was to have been Chief of Staff to a senior Vice-Admiral, and it was with some diffidence that I asked him if he would still care for the appointment under me. (He had been my senior, and would still have been, but for my luck in being given early promotion during the China War.) He replied at once that he would be delighted to come, directly he was relieved in the *Malaya*. Meanwhile Evans remained, and during the time he was with me, entered wholeheartedly into the new organisation for patrolling the minefield, and covering it with destroyer forces well to the eastward. He told me that he had been much impressed by the possibilities of the "Plans" proposals, when they were first put forward, and he has since recorded his views thus :

"A very fine plan was evolved at the Admiralty, according to which the whole of the Dover Strait in the vicinity of the minefield was to be illuminated by flares burnt from the auxiliary patrol craft, and this portion of the Channel was to rejoice in eternal day, so to speak. Provided that the flares were burnt in organised fashion, it would be impossible for a submarine to pass through the Strait on the surface, which the Admiralty assumed they had been doing. The idea was that with sufficient hunting craft operating in the illuminated area, any submarines sighted would be forced to dive."\*

On receiving my appointment, I had arranged for Captain Tomkinson to command the destroyers of the Dover Patrol, as soon as he could be relieved in the *Colossus*. He had been beside me in many tight places, and I felt that there would be many more ahead, before the Dover Patrol achieved all I meant it to attempt.

For some days I made it my business to go all round the patrols, ashore and afloat, night and day ; Evans was an excellent guide, and we visited the minefield patrol from end to end, always, I need hardly say, warning each section that a destroyer was approaching it, and getting an acknowledgment, before actually entering its area. The destroyer divisions which patrolled 10 to 15 miles to the eastward of the illuminated area, and covered

\* "Keeping the Seas," by Captain E. R. G. R. Evans, page 210.

the approaches from enemy waters, were visited with similar procedure. Indeed the whole essence of staff work in war is to ensure that every ship encountered in darkness or thick weather is definitely an enemy or a friend, and I had always worked to that end.\*

The Dover Patrol had an advanced base at Dunkirk, which was under the command of Commodore Hubert Lynes. Dunkirk was also the headquarters of the French *Préfet Maritime*—Admiral Ronarc'h—who had commanded the French Naval Division when it won imperishable fame in the defence of Dixmude. I took an early opportunity of calling on him, and found him most friendly and ready to help in every possible way. By the reciprocal arrangement, which placed the British Naval Forces in the Mediterranean under the French Commander-in-Chief, and those in the Channel and the Atlantic under British Command, the French sea-going vessels formed part of my command, and a division of French destroyers were attached to the Sixth Flotilla and always worked under a British leader.

The strategic importance of Dunkirk and the forces maintained there can hardly be exaggerated, as the latter were a constant threat on the flank of any enemy force which attempted to enter the Channel. It also provided a covering force on the flank of the Allied Army.

The activities of the Dover Patrol were immense, and Admiral Bacon had built up an enormous organisation, which carried out its daily duties with great regularity and efficiency. For instance, the channels along the coast from Dungeness to the Downs and to the French ports were swept every morning, before the trade and transports passed through them. The troop carriers, which carried drafts and leave parties between Folkestone and Boulogne, were each escorted by two destroyers, as were the hospital ships between Calais and Dover, which, since the deliberate torpedoeing of a properly marked hospital ship, bore no distinguishing marks, and did not fly the red cross, though they were used exclusively for bringing wounded from France.

\* It will be remembered that prior to the action of the Heligoland Bight, I told our submarines exactly what British ships would be present, but owing to faulty staff work at the Admiralty, we were not warned that a number of other British ships would be operating in the same area, and disastrous results were narrowly averted.—Vol. I, page 81.



The vessels of the patrol numbered over 300, including large and small monitors, the light cruiser *Attentive*, flotilla leaders, destroyers, P-boats, trawlers, drifters, minesweepers of various types, M.L.s C.M.B.s and submarines. A proportion of each class were of course out of action for brief periods for refit, boiler cleaning, etc., but I found that on a normal night it was possible to concentrate above the minefield, four of the older destroyers or P-boats burning searchlights, 14 trawlers burning flares, at least 60 drifters, about four motor launches and two large minesweepers of a new type, carrying four-inch guns and searchlights.

This force was supported by one of the large monitors, armed with two 12-inch guns in addition to their secondary armament of six-inch guns. I looked to the commanding officer of this monitor—which took up a position about the centre of the patrol to the eastward of the Varne—to keep me in touch with what was going on. Light buoys were laid, to mark the limits of the minefield, as a guide to the patrol. By day the force was reduced as far as possible, and the strength varied with the visibility, sufficient vessels being kept above the minefield to ensure that no enemy submarine could pass on the surface.

The covering force of destroyers was maintained, as far as possible, at a strength of about six to eight flotilla leaders and destroyers, mounting four-inch guns. These were in two divisions, called the E. and W. barrage patrols, and their object was to cover the approach from the eastward, and they patrolled on a line of about five miles N.E. and S.W., from five to ten miles to the N.E. of the minefield patrol. A specially laid light buoy and the Goodwin Light Ship, served as guides to the two divisions respectively.

The shipping in the Downs was protected by six-inch batteries at Foreness and North Foreland, and by the *Marshal Ney*, a large monitor mounting a number of six-inch guns, moored off Broadstairs. She originally had two 15-inch guns, but her internal combustion engines were so unreliable that she was converted into a stationary guardship, and the 15-inch guns were replaced by extra six-inch guns.

The *Attentive* and a division of destroyers were anchored in the Downs off Deal, with steam on their engines and slips on their cables, ready to get under way at short notice, to protect

the shipping or to reinforce the patrolling destroyers if necessary.

The shipping in Dunkirk Roads and the left flank of the Allied Army was protected by large monitors and destroyers, other vessels rested in Dunkirk Harbour. The only vessels in Dover Harbour were a duty destroyer, ready to embark Tomkinson or myself at short notice, and the vessels refitting and boiler cleaning.

During the dark night periods, these were reduced to a minimum, and every available vessel was out on patrol, or standing by to go out at short notice. The destroyers which had been escorting troop carriers and hospital ships during the day were, as far as possible, given the anchored positions during the night, in order that the crews might have some rest. Advantage was taken of bright moonlight weather to refit, boiler clean and give as much rest as possible to the hardworked crews.

My command included a number of naval guns, supporting the left flank of the Army. The R.M.A. Heavy Siege Train, consisting of four 12-inch and three 9.2-inch guns, under Lieut.-Colonel R. V. T. Ford, R.M.A., and the R.N. Siege Guns, four 9.2-inch and two 7.5-inch guns, manned by naval ratings, under the command of Captain H. C. Halahan, R.N. There were also two 9.2-inch and six 7.5-inch British naval guns which had been turned over to the French.

The Fifth Group of the Royal Naval Air Service, which worked under my orders, consisted of five squadrons—about 90 aeroplanes—reconnaissance and photographic machines, day and night bombers and fighters, based on aerodromes to the westward of Dunkirk. This force was under the command of Air Commodore Charles Lambe, who came over to see me soon after I arrived with my Air Staff officer, Wing Commander F. C. Halahan.

He told me that Admiral Bacon had been very averse to bombing attacks, and had expressed the view that little or no damage could be inflicted by bombs, moreover, attacks on German military objects only provoked retaliation on Allied towns, and consequently very few attacks had been made. However, after the enemy had succeeded in dropping bombs on the Andruicq Ammunition Dump, between Calais and St. Omer, and had destroyed some 8,000 tons of ammunition, thus delaying the British offensive, the embargo was lifted to the extent that

a few attacks were permitted, if carried out in conjunction with French and Belgian aircraft. Commodore Lambe told me that this was a most unsatisfactory arrangement, as the Belgians had very few aircraft, and the French squadrons in that area were resting. I then gave him full liberty to attack the many military objects within reach, by day and night, whenever the weather conditions permitted, and assured him that the more offensive he was the better I would be pleased. Whereupon our splendid young naval airmen commenced a most ruthless and ceaseless assault on everything German that could be attacked, without risk to the Belgian civil population.

I took an early opportunity of interviewing the monitor captains. Commander Altham, who commanded one of the 12-inch monitors, told me that they had not fired their guns for a year, because they were outranged by the enemy. His monitor had, however, been detailed to push one of the 800 foot lighters on to the beach, in Admiral Bacon's proposed "Great Landing" on the Belgian Coast; and he understood that he was to ram, or lay, his ship alongside Zeebrugge Mole, if Admiral Bacon's project ever matured. I told him that he would not have to do that, but promised him that he would be hotly engaged with the enemy before long. He told me of a gyroscopic gun director, which he had designed and submitted to Admiral Bacon. I said it would be a most valuable adjunct for the system of firing I meant to introduce, directly the means for accurately determining a vessel's position was perfected, and this Captain Douglas had in hand.

It was indeed a curious situation which I had inherited in the Dover Straits. On the one hand the attacks of our aircraft were restricted because of the fear of retaliation; and our 12-inch monitors were not allowed to engage the enemy for fear of getting within the range of their guns. On the other hand, the enemy had refrained from provoking us for the last nine months. Their destroyers had resisted the temptation of destroying our anti-submarine barrage, though there was nothing to prevent them doing so; and their submarines were forbidden to attack vessels, or carry out any hostile action within the Dover Patrol area.

Modern war is too costly in life and treasure to prolong the agony by inaction. Thousands of our men were fighting

desperately in other areas, and I felt that a decision must now be fought for in the area confided to my charge. I had learnt my lesson off Gallipoli, where I had watched a campaign that had infinite possibilities peter out through irresolution; and, cost what it might, I was determined to put an end to the peaceful inaction in the Dover Straits, for which our shipping farther afield was paying so heavily.

I studied the records of German raids, and found that 12 enemy destroyers had raided the patrol on the night of 26th-27th October, 1916. The Admiralty had warned Admiral Bacon on 24th October, that a flotilla of destroyers from the Heligoland Bight had arrived at the Belgian ports to reinforce the Flanders Flotilla, and other indications pointed to enemy activity. Admiral Bacon did not consider a raid on the Straits likely, as the enemy had not hitherto attempted one, and in his opinion: "No useful military purpose would be served by their entering the Straits." He considered the shipping in the Downs as the most probable objective, and he made his dispositions for the night on the assumption that, the places "which required most safeguarding were the Belgian coast and the Downs." No warning appears to have been issued to the Patrol as to possible enemy activity.

At that date, 28 drifters in four divisions watched the net barrage across the Straits, and were supported by the *Flirt*, an old 30-knot destroyer. The *Flirt* actually sighted a force of enemy destroyers, steaming at high speed to the N.W., i.e. towards the drifter patrol. She challenged, they replied with the same signal, and proceeded on their way, but incredible as it may seem, despite the incorrect reply, she mistook them for British destroyers. Later, hearing firing to the northward, she stood towards it, and finding a sinking drifter and men swimming, she lowered a boat to pick them up, and while doing so was herself sunk, the only survivors being the officer and men in the boat. Six drifters were sunk and three damaged with severe casualties.

Another division of enemy destroyers, evidently in search of transports, captured the *Queen*, which was empty, no troops being carried at night; they allowed the crew to escape in their boats before proceeding to sink her.

As no attack had been expected, the greatest confusion seems to have reigned, and the destroyer divisions, which proceeded with all dispatch from Dover, the Downs and Dunkirk, when they met the enemy mistook them for friends. Individual destroyers lost touch with their leaders. The *Nubian*, which was alone, mistook five German destroyers for British vessels, and the *Amazon* did likewise. In each case the challenge was replied to by heavy gunfire, and both vessels suffered severely. The *Nubian* was also torpedoed and had her bows blown off. A division led by the *Viking* also mistook the enemy for friends, and her challenge was similarly greeted. Afterwards Admiral Bacon announced that two enemy destroyers had been sunk by explosions when crossing the net barrage; but we know now that this was not the case, and that the enemy escaped practically unscathed. It is, however, on record that 14 British destroyers crossed the mined net barrage at various points during the night and suffered no damage.

On the night of 17th March, 1917, the destroyer *Paragon*, patrolling off the barrage, sighted three or four destroyers, which she *ought to have known* could not be British, but being in doubt, she challenged, and was at once sunk by a torpedo; all her officers and most of her crew perished.

These unpleasant experiences no doubt accounted for Admiral Bacon's reluctance to patrol the minefield at night. It can well be imagined that the protection of the brightly illuminated deep minefield patrol was a constant anxiety to me, particularly on dark and misty nights. It simply invited attack. With the vessels at my disposal, I did not think I could better the disposition of the destroyers that I have described; it could not guarantee, of course, that enemy destroyers would not be able to slip by the destroyer patrols unseen; but if they were seen, a green rocket was the signal for all lights to be extinguished; the fishing vessels were to run for the British and French coasts with all dispatch; and the fighting vessels, after covering their retreat, were to rally to the monitor.

If the enemy were not sighted until they reached the minefield patrol, the vessels attacked were to fire a green rocket. One thing seemed absolutely certain, that the enemy would be brought to action when returning from a raid, at any rate, and I hoped that they would be attacked with the same valiant spirit as that

displayed by the destroyer leaders *Swift* and *Broke*, when they engaged four German destroyers, and sank two of them, in the next and last raid in April, 1917.

My dispositions were arranged so that no strange destroyers, approaching one of our divisions, could possibly be regarded as friends, unless previous notice of their approach had been given by wireless *and acknowledged*. The importance of this was always emphasised during my inspections of the patrol.

Having been a Chief of Staff, and being a firm believer in the staff system—to which so many admirals of an older generation were opposed—I set to work to collect and organise a Staff, to carry out the numerous services connected with the offensive campaign I meant to wage against the enemy's submarines and his bases on the Belgian coast.

I was glad to be able to keep Lieutenant Morgan, who had been Admiral Bacon's Flag Lieutenant; as mine, who had joined the *Colossus* shortly before I left her, had already taken another appointment, which he did not feel at liberty to give up. My Secretary—Staff Paymaster Haine, who had been with me throughout the Gallipoli Campaign, in the *Colossus*, and at the Admiralty, came to Dover; but as he would be fully occupied on shore, I selected a young Assistant Paymaster—G. Woolley—to accompany me afloat. He had also been with me off Gallipoli. It will be remembered that after the silencing of the outer forts on 25th February, 1915, the *Vengeance* landed a party to complete the destruction of the guns,\* which promised to be a hazardous proceeding. Woolley seeking adventure, had stowed himself away in one of the boats, but was spotted by the Commander, who asked him what the devil he was doing there. He meekly replied that he was going to take notes for the Torpedo-Lieutenant in charge of the demolition party. The Commander being softhearted allowed him to go. Hearing of this, I asked Admiral de Robeck, when he left the *Vengeance* to join the *Queen Elizabeth*, to bring Woolley with him. He then came to my office, and took notes for me whenever I went ashore.

When I said good-bye to Admiral Jellicoe, I promised to look after Commander A. Bedford, who was his Naval Assistant, so I took him to Dover, where he did much valuable work on my

\* Vol. I, page 108.

Staff until later in the year, when I managed to get him an independent command.

Among the officers I secured was Lieut.-Commander Sandford, who had been one of my assistants on Admiral de Robeck's Staff, until he lost an eye and was ordered home.\*

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Edward Seymour, who had been Commander-in-Chief during the China Campaign, and a very good friend to me, when he heard of my appointment, wrote to ask me to take his cousin—Commander Seymour Osborne—as gunnery officer on my Staff, and I was glad to be able to do so. I also applied for Major Godfrey, who I thought would be invaluable for drafting and co-ordinating the operation orders for my enterprises, as he was a master of expression and clarity. Unfortunately the Admiral with whom he was serving, in a shore appointment at Malta, could not spare him, and he did not actually join me until 23rd August, 1918.

I looked very thoroughly into the records of the bombardments which had been carried out on the Belgian coast by the monitors, and found that they had a good deal to learn from our experience off Gallipoli, where bombardments from ships and monitors had reached a very high pitch of efficiency, thanks to the wholehearted co-operation of artillery officers, and the invaluable services of Captain Douglas and Lieut.-Commander Haselfoot, two Hydrographic officers who had been appointed to Admiral de Robeck's Staff. Fortunately these two officers were now at the Admiralty and available, so I asked for them to be appointed to my Staff at once, and this was approved.

The accommodation for my augmented Staff was very inadequate, and I decided to build a wooden office, as near as possible to mine. The only available space was being excavated for a large dug-out, which was to have a heavy concrete roof, supported by great steel girders, the latter were already in place. However, these were removed, the excavation was filled in, and my new office was built on its site, with the balance of the money which had been allocated for the construction of the dug-out.

I was told that on bright moonlight nights, when air raids were likely, nervous people went into the old caves, cut in the chalk cliffs, or else into the surrounding country, well clear of the town; but the great majority took the air raids pretty calmly,

\* See Vol. I, page 177.

and I only remember seeing two other dug-outs at Dover, one of which was being excavated in a little garden in front of the Destroyer Headquarters. This was filled in when Captain Tomkinson arrived on the 13th January.

When Boyle came a week later, he took up his quarters with Tomkinson, which was a very convenient arrangement, the house was connected by a private telephone line with my exchange, which was in direct telephonic communication with the Admiralty, all the outlying stations of the Command, both on the British and French coast, and with the Army Headquarters in France.

In the meantime I had pretty well got in touch with the work of the Dover Patrol, and though the minefield was still very thinly mined, the organisation of the day and night patrol above it, and the covering patrol of modern destroyers to the east of it, was working well, thanks to Evans, and the officers commanding the auxiliary patrol units. I felt very sorry to part with Evans, whose offensive spirit appealed to me, and I suggested that I might find a good appointment for him, if he cared to remain in the Dover Patrol ; but he told me he was seedy, his eyes had been giving him trouble, and he had been advised to take a rest, so the matter went no further.

I had no difficulty in getting into touch with all the local authorities who, from the Mayor—Mr. Edwin Farley—downwards, were most helpful and ready to co-operate in every possible way. Fortunately I knew Dover very well ; when I commanded the *Venus* in the Atlantic Fleet, we made our headquarters there during the winter of 1909-1910, in order to test its suitability as a base for six battleships and the six cruisers attached to the Fleet. The *Venus* was secured alongside the north end of the eastern arm of the breakwater, which was the most exposed berth in the harbour, and a very precarious one it proved in westerly gales.

During the next four years, before the War, when I was head of the Submarine Service, I had taken part in a number of exercises in the Dover Straits, to test our war dispositions and patrol arrangements, either as Warden of the Straits, or in command of the raiders. As the result of these exercises and my previous experience in the *Venus*, a camber was constructed in the north-east corner of the harbour, for a submarine base, and it proved of



immense value to the small craft of the Dover Patrol throughout the War.

I had also spent some hours on the Belgian coast with Admiral Hood, during one of his engagements with the enemy near Ostend. Actions were fought in those days at ranges many thousands of yards closer than was now possible. So I was no stranger to the Dover Patrol area, and the fact that, in company with Tomkinson, I had thoroughly inspected Zeebrugge, the entrance to the Bruges Canal, and the lock gates, during our stay there in the *Lurcher* in October, 1914, was most helpful in the preparation of the plan of attack, which was proceeding apace.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ANTI-SUBMARINE CAMPAIGN PROVOKES RETALIATION

Minelaying off Zeebrugge; Preparations to meet a raid on Straits; Attack delivered on Yarmouth and Southwold; Four German submarines destroyed; Germans retaliate by destroyer raid; Submarine shells Dover; Aeroplane raid; A Court Martial; German account of raid.

ON 11th January, five destroyers arrived from Immingham, to lay a minefield in the northern approaches to Zeebrugge, which were known to be used by enemy submarines and destroyers. Two of the minelaying destroyers were newly commissioned and had no experience whatever in minelaying. As the operation was to be carried out on a dark night in shoal water, in the vicinity of a recently laid minefield, I decided to postpone the undertaking, until they could be given some instruction. Thanks to the delay, the mines were available at a very opportune moment.

Early in the afternoon of the 14th January, Tomkinson, who had only joined the previous day, sailed in company with the minelayers, to pick up an escort of eight destroyers from Dunkirk, including three French destroyers, with orders to carry out the operation at 2 a.m. on the 15th, should the unsettled weather permit.

Towards nightfall I received information from Admiral Hall, which pointed to a strong force of enemy destroyers being at sea. He told me that he thought they probably included the powerful destroyers, which were being built in Germany for Argentina, but were taken over by the German Navy when war broke out. These were generally led by Commander Heinecke, who had attacked and destroyed a Norwegian convoy, escorted by the *Pellew* and *Partridge*, only a month previously.

I only hoped that it might be so, and that he intended to attack the deep minefield patrol. He had sunk a number of unarmed neutral merchantmen with ruthless ferocity, giving the crews little chance of escape. Moreover, after his success, he concluded

his wireless report by shouting his name, and I longed to meet him and settle the score.

All the vessels on patrol were told exactly what to expect. The drifters were ordered to withdraw to Ambleteuse Roads and behind Dungeness. The monitor *General Wolfe*, the 30-knot destroyers, P-boats and paddle minesweepers burning searchlights, and the trawlers burning flares, were directed to continue to illuminate the patrolled area throughout the night, or until the green warning signal was made.

The E. and W. Barrage Patrols were reinforced by all the available vessels, including half those which were boiler cleaning, the other half providing the personnel necessary to replace the officers and men on leave.

At 8 p.m. I hoisted my flag in the *Attentive* and took charge of the covering force, which included one light cruiser, four flotilla leaders and six large destroyers in two divisions, disposed one on either flank of the enemy's line of approach; out of the glare of the searchlights and flares, but in a position to see the enemy silhouetted against the illumination, should they succeed in passing to attack the minefield patrol.

Before embarking I telephoned to the Admiralty, to ask for the exact position of the Harwich Force, and learnt that it was not at sea. I explained the situation to the Commodore at Dunkirk, and to Captain Tomkinson by telephone, impressing on the latter the importance of laying the mines if possible, since there was every prospect of the enemy returning through them.

The situation was complicated by the risk of the minelayers being engaged by the enemy before discharging their mines, and also by the threatening weather, which at 9 p.m., when the expedition sailed from Dunkirk, was such that I would certainly have cancelled the minelaying, had there not been such a favourable prospect of inflicting loss on the enemy.

Soon after midnight, the Admiralty signalled that the *Conquest* and four destroyers had left Harwich, and an hour later that Yarmouth and Southwold had been shelled at 11.15 p.m. by hostile destroyers, probably from Zeebrugge.

I therefore signalled to Admiral Tyrwhitt and the *Conquest*, that 13 destroyers would be to the south-east of Rabs Shoal until 3 a.m. (by which time if all went well the minelaying would be

completed) and then near Thornton Ridge, but if the *Conquest* could not arrive in time, I proposed to send my destroyers to Schouwen Bank light vessel (in Tyrwhitt's area) the most favourable position for intercepting the enemy. Tyrwhitt concurred in my proposal and told me that the *Conquest* would not go south of Lat.  $51^{\circ} 45' N.$ , and would be told that the Sixth Flotilla were ordered to the Schouwen Bank.

Tomkinson was kept informed of what was going on, and given his orders, but by prearrangement, he made no signals of acknowledgment, to avoid giving his position away to the enemy's wireless directional stations.

The weather rapidly got worse, but I did not cancel the mining operation, as I considered that if all went well, it would be completed an hour before the enemy's return. Tomkinson persisted with great determination, and much to their credit, the *Legion*, *Meteor* and *Ariel* laid their mines, despite the heavy sea, but it was too much for the inexperienced newcomers.

In the meantime, I sent the 15-inch monitors *Erebus* and *Terror* and two destroyers to Thornton Ridge with all dispatch, to support Tomkinson. At daylight they should have been in a position to engage the enemy anywhere between the new minefield and Zeebrugge, had the weather been clear, but by daylight it was blowing very hard from S.W. with driving rain, which reduced the visibility to under  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles, and neither the monitors nor destroyers sighted the enemy. Presumably they came from the Heligoland Bight, and returned there, and did not enter our area.

It was a great disappointment, but Hall told me when I returned, that he felt pretty certain that he would know when Heinecke set out again and he would give me good warning.

The first few weeks of my command were very disappointing, and although submarines were repeatedly sighted, both by day and night, and driven to dive hurriedly by the intensive patrol, they apparently continued to pass through the minefield unscathed. However, it seems probable that we were more successful than we knew at the time; for instance, the destroyer *Mermaid* reported that she had sighted a submarine off Cape Gris Nez steering west, at 9 p.m. on the 19th January; the submarine dived into the minefield and ten minutes afterwards a heavy explosion was heard. The German official record states

that *U95* went into the Channel about this time and was never heard of again, so this was probably the submarine seen by the *Mermaid*. Of course, the odds at first were greatly in their favour, but as fresh lines of mines were laid at varying depths, the odds shortened, and at length my office diary laconically recorded :

“ 26/1/18. 0805. Drifter *Beryl II* engaged an enemy submarine, steering west, off Gris Nez. Her second shot hit and submarine dived. The submarine was a large one with two periscopes, she had two guns, one before and one abaft the conning tower.

1030. H.M.S. *Leven* attacked and sank a hostile submarine, which was submerged with her periscope showing, six miles north of Calais. Seven men came to the surface, but only one survivor was picked up. This man subsequently died.”

At first the *Beryl's* submarine was believed to have escaped, but a little later, a heavy explosion was heard in the minefield, and oil was located coming to the surface. Divers were sent down and she was identified as *U109*, a large submarine from the Heligoland Bight, bound for the Atlantic.

The *Leven's* submarine was ascertained later to be *UB35* homeward bound. The previous day, a German submarine had been surprised alongside a Greek steamer off the Isle of Wight by a Portsmouth patrol vessel, which arrived on the scene and forced the submarine to dive hurriedly, leaving one man on board the steamer. He was taken prisoner, but would give no information. Subsequently it was discovered that he belonged to *UB35*, so he had a lucky escape.

The *Leven* was an old coal-burning 30-knot destroyer, which had been in a flotilla I had commanded 16 years before. I was told that her Captain (Lieut.-Commander A. P. Melsom, R.N.R.) had been obsessed for a long time with the determination to sink a German submarine ; he had managed to obtain a number of additional depth charges, and had organised his ship's company to discharge them very rapidly, under control from the bridge. As the *Leven* was engaged in running a mail and ferry service between Dover and Dunkirk, her chance of falling in with a

submarine was very slender ; however her alert captain sighted a periscope on the bow, and tried to ram it, but finding that he could not turn sharply enough, he reversed his helm and swung the *Leven's* stern over it, letting go all the depth charges as the submarine dived deep to avoid being rammed. There was a tremendous explosion, and the submarine must have been literally burst open, for an officer and six men rose to the surface in a huge bubble of air. The *Leven* lowered a boat at once, but only succeeded in picking up one man, who survived a few minutes. Lieut.-Commander Melsom received a well deserved D.S.O.

On 4th February, the destroyer *Zubian*\* sighted a submarine off Dungeness at 5.30 a.m., and dropped a number of depth charges above her when she dived. Other destroyers joined in the hunt and dropped more depth charges, and large quantities of oil came to the surface, so the spot was buoyed. Later a diver was sent down, and *UC50* was found there. While the hunt was in progress, I went out in a seaplane to watch it, but the engine failed, and we made an unpleasant forced landing on the rough sea. We were a long way to the westward of the patrol when we fell, and although there were a number of vessels to be seen from the air, there was nothing in sight from the surface of the sea. It was a couple of hours before we were picked up, and I was haunted by a horrible fear that a German submarine might come up and take us prisoners to Germany. My Staff were much concerned when the seaplane failed to return, and sent out C.M.B.s to search for us, and one of them eventually brought us home, after a very rough and bumpy passage.

At 9.30 p.m. on 8th February, a German submarine, which was identified later as *UB38*, was sighted by some drifters on patrol and forced to dive ; she struck a mine and was destroyed.

Several other submarines were sighted and forced to dive, but were fortunate enough to escape the mines.

We have learnt that, by this time, the Germans had become aware that some unpleasant new measures were being taken against them in the Straits, and that after *U109* failed to return, all submarines from the Heligoland Bight were ordered to go round the north of Scotland.

\* The *Zubian* had been ingeniously constructed out of the *Zulu* and the *Nubian*, after the former had had her stern, and the latter her bow blown off.

I felt certain that the heavy losses that we had inflicted on the enemy's submarines would provoke reprisals before long, but I hoped that our Intelligence Department would be able to give us warning, as they did on the 11th January, so that I might be at sea when the expected attack was delivered.

On 14th February, Admiral Hall telephoned to tell me that a submarine, commanded by a very determined German officer, was homeward bound, and would probably pass through the patrol that night, and might well try to do so on the surface. A warning to this effect was passed to all vessels on patrol. At 11.45 p.m. that night, the drifter *Shipmates* reported a submarine on the surface, but no further report was received until about an hour later, when the Port War Signal Station reported gunfire, and a few minutes later (12.55 a.m.) we could hear heavy firing in the direction of the minefield patrol, which was still brilliantly illuminated. The firing was very audible for over half an hour, and during this time several white and red Very lights (the signal for an enemy submarine on the surface) were sighted. No green lights were seen, and I thought for some time that the submarine must be defying the drifters, declining to dive, and attempting to rush the patrol on the surface.

At 1.15 a.m. I began to feel anxious, as the firing had been almost continuous, and it seemed very unlikely that a submarine could have remained on the surface so long. No report having been received from the monitor or the destroyers on patrol, I signalled to the former to ask what the firing was. As ill luck would have it, the 12-inch monitor which should have been on patrol, had developed defects; the other large monitors, which were all commanded by trustworthy senior officers, were refitting, or at Dunkirk, and the senior officer on the minefield patrol was therefore the Commander of the monitor *M26*. At 1.35, no answer having been received from the monitor, I ordered the destroyers in the Downs to rendezvous south of the Goodwins with the *Moorsom*, the duty destroyer, in which Captain Tomkinson was proceeding to join them. Meanwhile I remained in telephonic communication with all the centres, waiting for information on which to act; but I received no answer from *M26* until 1.53, when she reported that the firing had been south of the N.E. Varne, and that she was proceeding to investigate. This signal was timed 1.37; the firing had ceased about 1.30.

I was still in complete ignorance as to what had been occurring, and at 2.5, I again signalled to ask *M26* if she had anything to report. At 2.30 she replied, "Drifter at No. 30 buoy reports trawler fired a green Very light. All quiet now." This was the first report received of a green light having been seen; and at 2.58 I received a signal from the old destroyer *Syren*, reporting that she had come across the burning wreck of the drifter *Cosmos*, which sank at 2.16. This left no doubt as to a raid having taken place. I learnt later that green lights were actually seen by *M26* about 1 a.m.

At 3.18, the *Termagant*, leader of the E. Barrage Patrol, signalled: "*Amazon* reports three destroyers passed, steering E. at 2.24, position one mile S.W. of No. 11.A buoy." As these could not have been British, I knew that the raiding enemy destroyers must have escaped. (See Plan, page 184.)

At 3.10 and again at 3.19, Folkestone reported red and white Very lights S.E. at 3.5; and at 3.36 the drifter *Chrysanthemum* reported that she had sighted a submarine near the Folkestone Gate at 3.5.

The numerous red and white Very lights, reporting the presence of enemy submarines, seemed to indicate that more than one German submarine had attempted the passage of the Straits, under cover of the destroyer attack on the patrol. During the small hours of the morning, information came slowly in, which showed that the enemy destroyers had inflicted considerable loss on the auxiliary vessels of the patrol, and had escaped without being brought to action by the monitor or the destroyers on the barrage patrol. The casualties amounted to a trawler and seven drifters sunk, and the paddle minesweeper *Newbury* and three drifters very severely and two slightly damaged, with 76 officers and men killed and 13 wounded.

I visited the damaged vessels and interviewed the survivors of those sunk during the forenoon; several cases of most conspicuous gallantry were reported to me, and I was much struck by the dogged spirit displayed by the crews of the vessels preparing to join the patrol that night. I learnt, however, from a side wind, that they were saying pretty hard things about the failure of the naval ships to engage the enemy, which was not surprising, and I was consumed with cold fury against those whose failure had let the patrol down so badly. Making every



possible allowance for the impression caused by the special submarine warning—borne out by several submarine reports—and the confusion which arose in an atmosphere of searchlights, flares and their smoke, and taking into consideration the frequent encounters with submarines which had taken place of late, I felt that there could be no possible excuse for the failure of the monitor, P-boats and destroyers to make any report, until the attack was over and the enemy had made good their escape.

There were other occurrences which demanded a searching investigation, and I appointed a Court of Inquiry, under Admiral Dampier, to go fully into the matter.

Meanwhile it was essential to re-establish the patrol, without a moment's delay, and that evening, Captains Howard and Bird embarked in a trawler and drifter respectively and led out reinforcements; and that night the minefield patrol was more brilliant, more aggressive, and more thickly patrolled than ever. I was told later, that before sailing, Bird had assembled his drifter crews, who were undoubtedly a bit shaken, and made a most inspiring speech to them, concluding with: "Don't you make any mistake about it, the Admiral will take tea with those blighters before long, and make them pay for last night's raid."

That night Captain Heinecke shouted a boastful claim on his wireless that he had sunk a large guardship, 25 armed fishing vessels, a torpedo-boat, a U-boat chaser and some motor-boats.

About midnight a submarine lay off Dover and fired 22 shells into the town; the *Swift*, which was on the W. Barrage Patrol, was soon on the spot, but the submarine had disappeared, leaving some mines near the east entrance, which were evidently intended to catch destroyers coming out of the harbour to drive her off. But as all the destroyers were at sea, and the mines, which had been laid shallow, were awash in the morning, they were swept up and did no damage. The shells killed a child and wounded five people.

The next night the enemy concluded their retaliation by dropping twenty bombs in the Dover area, without causing any casualties, however; they then announced by wireless, that their vessels had visited the Dover Patrol light barrier and had found it completely deserted and in darkness; this lie probably to justify a cessation of hostilities against us. As a matter of fact, the losses they inflicted only hardened everyone's determination

to bar the Straits. Fresh lines of mines were laid, the patrols were strengthened, and continued to invite attack in a blaze of light.

Nevertheless I felt impelled to call the Admiralty's attention to the weakness of the Dover Patrol for waging an offensive war; since the enemy could always concentrate a superior force to attack one of the several detachments, I had of necessity to maintain, within two or three hours steaming of his bases.

I pointed out that during the dark periods, which lasted about 18 days, every available torpedo craft was at the ready throughout the night, and only a very small proportion got any rest in the daytime; on the other hand, the enemy could leave his base fresh, for a brief outing and a definite purpose, whereas our people were bound to be tired and stale towards the end of the dark periods, after constant routine patrolling and escort duty.

My service as Director of Plans had taught me, that the number of torpedo craft in the Fleet was insufficient to provide for all the services on which they could be employed, and that in allocating the limited number available, the Admiralty had to be guided by the relative importance of the many conflicting demands.

I knew that a number of new "V" and "W" class destroyers would shortly be ready for service, and I begged that four might be allocated to Dover, in order that I might add a third division to the barrage patrol, and thus reduce the chance of the enemy slipping by unseen. In the meantime I urged that, until the new destroyers were available, a division might be lent from Harwich during the dark periods. I also asked that eight new P-boats with four-inch guns, might be sent to support the auxiliary craft on the minefield, six old 30-knot destroyers could then be surrendered if necessary.

The Court of Inquiry reported that the *Amazon* did not carry out the regulations as to challenging, neither did she obey the very definite patrol instructions, but "noted in her favour, that vessels of the patrol on detached service had been known to pass through the patrol without warning, and her Captain may have thought that this was a case in point." It transpired that the *Amazon* reported to her leader in the *Termagant* at 2.25: "Three of our destroyers have just passed steering E."

Whereupon the *Termagant* signalled: "How did you know they were ours, and what was the time?" and the *Amazon* replied: "2.24 a.m. Passed two cables astern of me. They did not reply to challenge." These signals were passed up and down the line by shaded flashing lamp, and occupied half an hour, during which time the *Termagant* continued her course, and the opportunity of bringing the enemy to action passed.

The Court remarked that: "The *Termagant* would have been better advised to have turned at once towards the ships reported, whilst interrogating *Amazon*, instead of waiting for *Amazon's* further reply." They reported that if the printed orders (issued by me on 11th January, 1918) for the guidance of the vessels on patrol had been carried out, there would not only have probably been fewer casualties, but also the presence of the enemy would have been disclosed. They drew attention, however, to the special submarine warning, and to the fact that it had always been impressed on the vessels of the patrol, that their most important duty was to destroy submarines. This could only be done by remaining over the minefield, and it was a testimony to the bravery with which they carried out the spirit of their instructions that so many perished. Evidence showed that there was great reluctance to take the responsibility of firing the green light, as this meant the abandonment of the minefield. The Court found that the Captain of *M26*, who was specially detailed to support the minefield vessels, should have taken action when the green rocket was fired. He appears to have gone promptly in the direction of the firing, but he failed to appreciate the necessity for informing the Admiral and the fighting patrols, in order that action might be taken to intercept the enemy.

In forwarding this report to the Admiralty, I remarked that while concurring generally with the finding of the Court of Inquiry, I could find no excuse for the commanding officer of the *Amazon*, and very little for the commanding officer of the *Termagant*, and I proposed to try them both by Court Martial. I was advised that there was insufficient evidence to frame a charge for the trial by Court Martial of the commanding officer of *M26*, nevertheless, I requested that he should be relieved of his command at once. This was the second occasion on which he had failed to take advantage of golden opportunities of

rendering valuable service to the patrol; on this last occasion, he was occupying a very responsible position, and the escape of the enemy's raiding destroyers was mainly due to his inaction. In an area in which the enemy was always in close proximity, prompt action and an offensive spirit was essential, and his mind obviously worked too slowly for service in the Dover Patrol.

The Court Martial on the commanding officer of the *Amazon* found the charges proved and severely reprimanded him; a sentence which I considered very lenient, and I reported that the Court appeared to be unduly influenced by the line of defence adopted, which was based on a number of statements to the effect, that vessels had frequently passed through the patrols without previous warning in 1916 and 1917.

Until perusing the evidence of this Court Martial, which disclosed an extraordinary laxity in this respect in the past, I had no reason to suppose that the necessary precautions, which I had stressed, and which were so absolutely essential in war, were not a matter of the strictest routine. It seemed almost incredible that after the fate of the *Flirt* and *Paragon*, and the previous experience of the *Amazon*, *Nubian* and *Viking*, that such haphazard conduct should have persisted in the Dover Patrol.

The Admiralty concurred, and also expressed their astonishment and regret that a Court Martial, in time of war, should give the impression of condoning laxity, on a service where constant alertness was essential, particularly in this case, as the evidence proved that the enemy ships might well have been brought to action. The Admiralty then relieved the Captain of the *Amazon* of his command, and also the Captain of the *Termagant*, though without trying him by Court Martial. The commanding officer of *M26* had already been superseded.

The evidence given at the Court of Inquiry, brought out the inadequacy of the existing signalling arrangements, to give immediate warning in the event of a raid by enemy surface craft. I had not altered those which I found in force when I joined, except to ask for a more effective green signal than the Very light which was in use. Fifty green explosive signals had arrived about a week before the raid, and these were distributed as far as possible, but it happened that the drifters on the southern end of the patrol, which actually fired the green signals, only

had Very lights, and these could not be seen at the Port War Signal Station at Dover, or the look-out station at Folkestone.

Commanding officers of destroyers and smaller craft had so many things to think of, on suddenly sighting or coming under the fire of an enemy—helm, guns, torpedoes, etc., and it seemed to me essential to have, in addition to a visual signal, some simple emergency wireless signal, used with a procedure which would ensure immediate warning of the presence of the enemy, being received by all fighting vessels and my office at Dover.

The patrol orders referred to by the Court of Inquiry, as having been disobeyed by the *Amazon*, were issued by Admiral Bacon on 1st January, 1917, as a result of the German raid of 26th October, 1916; and referred particularly to a supplement issued on 25th March, 1917, a week after the sinking of the *Paragon*.\* The latter stated that: "Destroyers should not hesitate to use torpedoes at once, on sighting any vessels, without challenging, *under new conditions*." An admirable order, providing that commanding officers of all detached destroyers and divisions could be certain that, the staff work of the Command was such that, under no circumstances could they meet a friend except by pre-arrangement. It is clear, however, that this could not be relied upon in the past. For instance, I found the following paragraph in the instructions for the use of a special coloured light recognition signal for destroyers: "As friendly destroyers may be met with north of the barrage, destroyers must be prepared to answer the challenge in the usual way whenever it is made to them by any vessels." This warning was repeated every time a notice was issued for a change in the sequence of coloured lights for the challenge and reply, but I cancelled it when I assumed command.

Another order laid down that "It is not the function of the large destroyers in the first instance to force an unequal fight, *as our boats will be spread*. It is far more important to hang on and keep touch with the enemy. . . ." Scores of night exercises in destroyers before the War, and many nights at sea during the War, had taught me and others—brought up in the same school—that under modern conditions of war, one would have to make up one's mind in a few seconds whether a stranger was a friend or a foe, if one was to survive the encounter. I

\* See page 164.

therefore cancelled all the lengthy instructions for the conduct of destroyers on patrol, which I found in force, and issued short and concise orders on 11th March, which were to be studied and acted upon by all commanding officers, and officers who might be officers of the watch, of every ship under my command; they were also to thoroughly acquaint themselves with the current dispositions and composition of the various patrols.

After stating that our patrols were so disposed as to preclude all possibility of meeting, etc., and calling attention to the well-established Service practice—which ordained that ships joining or passing a detached force were to show dimmed navigation lights, or during an action, the fighting lights for the night—the order ran: “Suspicious vessels are to be regarded as enemy; unnecessary challenges are to be avoided; if the challenge is made and not immediately answered, offensive action is to be taken without any further delay.

“In the event of attacks, and these will certainly be repeated, the fighting vessels of the patrol are to use every endeavour to bring the enemy to action, and support to their utmost the numerous lightly-armed vessels on the minefield patrol.

“Flotilla leaders and destroyers should never hesitate to engage any superior force of torpedo craft at night—a resolute attack should be delivered, with intent to ram at high speed, and engage with gun and torpedo at close range whenever an opportunity occurs.” With a thought of the *Swift* and *Broke*, I added: “It is quite recognised that these tactics commend themselves to the commanding officers of the vessels in the Sixth Flotilla, and the object of this paragraph is to inform those officers that the Vice-Admiral approves of such action.”

It is interesting to read Admiral Scheer’s account of this raid.\*

“In February, 1918, . . . the Naval Corps in Flanders had sent a request to the commanders of the Fleet, begging them to destroy the English light-barrier which had just been instituted between Dover and Calais. In the last months the enemy had, with much expenditure of material, tried to make these Straits impassable for our U-boats. According to the reports of the boats, there were net barriers between Cape Gris Nez and Folkestone, and farther

\* See Plan. The net barrage was crossed four times by German destroyers.

south between Boulogne and Dungeness. The nets were guarded by a large number of vessels which, by means of searchlights and magnesium flares, formed a very effective light-barrier all night long. This made it very much more difficult for our U-boats to get through unmolested, and the Straits were actually almost impassable. The forces in Flanders alone were not able to deal a sufficiently effective blow to this Anglo-French barrier to the Channel. For this undertaking the commanders of the Fleet chose the strong boats of the Heinecke Flotilla, which was sent direct from the German Bight without first touching the coast of Flanders, so as to make sure of surprising the enemy. . . . In the night of the 15th (February) at 12.30 a.m. [Greenwich time 11.30 p.m.] the two half-flotillas separated according to plan north-east of the Sandettie Bank. The group led by Captain Heinecke was to circumvent the first and more northerly barrier near the English coast, and begin by attacking the southern barrier, presumed to be off Dungeness, and then on his return roll up the northern barrier from the Varne Bank to Folkestone. The latter being a light-barrier, could be seen from far off. On approaching it, it became clear that it consisted of a large number of craft. . . ." [Then followed a fairly accurate description of the patrol.] "In these circumstances it was impossible to get round the barrier, and the Flotilla Commander determined to make a direct attack. He first made for a large boat placed about the middle of the barrier with a specially bright revolving searchlight; this he sank from a distance of 300 metres. It was an old cruiser, or a special boat of the 'Arabis' type. [Presumably the paddle minesweeper *Newbury*.] After this the group first swept round to the north-west and then went more slowly along the barrier in a more or less south-easterly direction. In a short time they sank 13 of these guardships, including a U-boat chaser with the number '1113' [probably *ML12* but she was not hit] a small torpedo-boat and two motor-boats, one of which had come up in order to fire a torpedo; these were all sunk at close range by gunfire.

Meanwhile the other half-flotilla had turned towards the southern end of the barrier, and first made for Cape Gris

Nez. Again one of the boats developed a leakage in the condenser, but the commander of the half-flotilla could not dismiss the boat and had to reduce the speed of the other boats to that of the defective one. Off Calais the group encountered the first guardship, lying close to the coast, a large armed trawler, and taking her by surprise, sank her by gunfire. Steering west, they met a number of other boats which were using searchlights and magnesium lights. In several cases the supply of magnesium lights on the guardships caught fire owing to the shots. In this part of the barrier, too, it was some time before the boats realised that the enemy was among them, and retired to the west. Altogether this torpedo-boat half-flotilla sank 12 armed guardships and two motor-boats.

At 2.40 a.m. [1.40] the half-flotilla started upon the return journey. At 3.30 a.m. [2.30] the stern lights of six English destroyers [4] were sighted ahead. Owing to his unfavourable position with regard to the enemy and the reduced speed of one boat, which left him with only two boats that were quite intact, the commander of the half-flotilla was forced to avoid a fight. He turned off and did not reply to the enemy's signal. The latter at first followed in the wake of the half-flotilla, but after altering his course a few times was lost to view. On making for Zeebrugge the torpedo-boat G102 struck a mine\* about 12 nautical miles from the harbour entrance; two compartments filled with water, but the boat was able to reach the harbour without assistance. Three men were killed through this mishap. These were the only casualties of the expedition.

After replenishing their supply of oil fuel in Zeebrugge, the flotilla began its return journey in the evening of the same day and reached home without further incident. The damaged boat was temporarily repaired in Flanders and followed a few days later. The flotilla's success was due to the completeness of the surprise. Besides the direct damage inflicted on the enemy by the sinking of so many boats that were of value to him, we accomplished our aim of breaking the barrier across the Calais-Dover Straits through which our U-boats were again able to pass for the

\* Probably one of those laid on night of 14th-15th January.



time being. A scouting trip carried out the following day by the torpedo-boats of the Naval Corps showed that the guard had been completely withdrawn. . . .

The gunlayers did excellent work in shooting down the fast motor-boats which, owing to their speed, could only be discerned at the last moment, but were always knocked out by the first shot.”\*

This last claim was sheer invention on Heinecke's part. There were no fast motor-boats (C.M.B.s) present, and no motor launch (M.L.) was hit.

The fact that one of the German half-flotilla of three destroyers had her speed reduced by condenser trouble, makes the inaction of the *Termagant's* division of four destroyers all the more deplorable. The Germans would have had to abandon the cripple or remain to fight a superior force, with the Dunkirk division on the flank of their retirement.

Scheer certainly makes very exaggerated claims as to the losses inflicted, but discloses the fact that the German submarines were very much perturbed by our new anti-submarine measures. No doubt many submarines had scraped past mine moorings when they dived, which accounts for their belief that nets and not mines were under the illuminated patrol ; since those who were unfortunate enough to touch a mine did not survive to tell the tale. Scheer's account amply bears out my contention that the brilliantly illuminated, closely patrolled deep minefield, would prove a horrible menace for the submarines to face ; and also Bacon's expectation, which I shared, that it would invite attack and provoke a raid.

\* “Germany's High Sea Fleet in the World War,” by Admiral Scheer, pages 314-318.

## CHAPTER XV

### GERMAN RAID ON DUNKIRK

Tower scheme approved ; Destruction of *U58* ; Two submarines rush Straits in mist ; Correspondence with Admiralty ; German raid on Dunkirk ; Two German torpedo-boats sunk ; The *Botha* torpedoed ; H.M.S. *Terror* bombards Ostend Naval Base ; Naval aircraft bomb Bruges Naval Base.

AFTER this raid I suggested to the Admiralty, that prize money should be paid to the fishing vessels responsible for driving enemy submarines down on to the minefield—in recognition of their splendid work and the great risks they ran. This was approved, sums up to £1,000 were paid for the destruction of a submarine and the grant was made retrospective, at my request, to include *UB56* sunk on the 19th December, 1917—the first to be destroyed in the new flare-lit minefield.

When the Bragg loop proved to be definitely effective, we contended that if ten of Colonel Gibb's towers were placed across the Straits, and controlled minefields were radiated from them, they would form an impenetrable barrier to the passage of enemy submarines.

The towers were designed to mount four-inch guns with anti-aircraft elevation and searchlights, and each was to be manned by 40 marines. The scheme hung fire, as there was some difficulty about the cost, which proved to be a good deal more than was originally anticipated, and Admiral Wemyss told me that the final word now rested with the Prime Minister. He suggested that I should accompany him and Mr. Lloyd George the following day, when they were going to cross to France in one of the military transports, and then I could explain the difficulties and dangers of the existing patrol, and persuade him that the tower system would be an absolutely effective anti-submarine measure.

I walked up and down the deck of the transport with Mr. Lloyd George—equipped in the regulation lifebelt—for half an hour, and told him all about the scheme. I said that I was

afraid that the cost would be considerable—about £1,500,000—but a drop in the ocean of the war expenditure; moreover, the cost would soon be repaid, by saving in the loss of ships, and by relieving many patrol vessels for use elsewhere, in a less dangerously exposed position than that occupied by the lighted barrage patrol.

Mr. Lloyd George agreed, and the construction of ten towers was commenced at Shoreham, where a great space of water was dammed off to make a building dock for them. The labour was mainly provided by Sir David Mercer, who raised a Marine Labour Corps, of men unfit for service abroad, to do this secret work; the men being given to understand that they were constructing something for an extemporised harbour.

During the next two weeks, the Flanders submarines seem to have worked mainly in the North Sea, very few appear to have passed through the Straits, only two were actually sighted; but at 4 a.m. on 10th March, a submarine was driven down on to the minefield and destroyed. Papers, pieces of wood, and some bread of very inferior quality, came to the surface, and the submarine was identified as *UB58*.

At about 4 a.m. on the 11th March, an enemy submarine succeeded in rushing through the Straits on the surface in misty weather. The drifter *Tessie* chased and opened fire, but could not keep up with her; this submarine also escaped from a trawler without diving.

On 12th March at 3.50 a.m., the drifter *Chrysanthemum* reported by wireless: "A submarine on the surface, steering W.S.W. at full speed." The drifter chased and opened fire, but soon lost sight of the submarine in the mist. At 9 a.m. the same day, two drifters heard a submarine on the surface quite close to them, but it was too thick to see her. The submarine evidently took alarm, as they heard her hatches slam, as if she was diving hurriedly, but no mine explosion followed.

Meanwhile there had been a German submarine working near the Royal Sovereign Light Vessel—the western limit of my area—which succeeded in torpedoing one steamer and mining another, neither of which however sank. The mines were laid shallow, and sank one of our trawler minesweepers, but the remainder were swept up and traffic diverted. A small force was sent down to hunt the area, and no other losses were suffered.

The Patrol diary records, that during this week, Number 1 Wing, Royal Naval Air Service, destroyed 12 enemy aircraft, and drove nine down out of control.

On 12th March, not having received any reply to my request for reinforcements, I telegraphed to the Admiralty, reporting the inability of the slow drifters and trawlers to deal with the tactics pursued by the submarines, in the hazy weather which prevailed. Had there been sufficient torpedo-craft on patrol, the enemy submarines would probably not have escaped. I concluded by saying, that I felt very strongly that the special measures for the destruction of enemy submarines in the Straits of Dover were not being employed to their full value, and that the reinforcements I had urgently requested for the minefield patrol and its covering force were more than ever necessary to cope with the situation.

This telegram brought a prompt reply the following morning, the Admiralty regretted that they were unable to increase the force under my command; they had already authorised the exchange of four of my old 30-knot destroyers with four P-boats at Immingham. They then drew attention to the large number of destroyers under my command which were refitting, and observed that taking the 8th March as a typical day, only 15 destroyers out of 32 were available for service, i.e. 47 per cent., while 17 were refitting; whereas the number available for service among all the destroyer flotillas—except those of the Grand Fleet—was 166 out of 243, i.e. 68 per cent. They also refused my request for the loan of a division from the Harwich Force, during the dark periods.

Sir Eric Geddes, who had been sent to the Admiralty as First Lord to "get on with the Naval War," had brought some of the people with him who had helped him in civil life, and in the great work he had carried out organising a wonderful railway system behind the lines in France and Flanders. One of these was a statistician, who tried to apply statistical methods—such as were used by his railway company to decide whether the carriage of tomatoes or passengers was the more profitable, for instance—to the assessment of the relative value of the various patrols; elaborate tables were made out, from which it was expected to discover whether this or that patrol was pulling its weight. A torpedo-craft was a unit, regardless of its age, the

nature of its work, its liability to damage owing to enemy action, or navigational difficulties, and the facility of its base or bases for shelter, berthing, repairs, etc., so the tables were not really very helpful.

I felt sure that Admiral Wemyss had never seen the Admiralty letter, so I sent him a copy, saying that I knew that he and the Staff were thoroughly alive to the situation, and the difficult conditions under which the Patrol was working, but that comparisons such as those drawn, only caused intense irritation to people who were striving hard to get on with inadequate numbers and unsuitable vessels, in the face of difficulties, which captious office critics at the Admiralty were incapable of visualising. "However," I ended, "I feel better having got this, and my temperate official reply off my chest, and I hope that their Lordships, having strengthened my case for me, will comply with my modest request."

In my official reply, I said that it would appear that a censure was implied, whereas the high percentage of vessels out of action provided the strongest argument for replacing the old worn-out torpedo-craft of the Sixth Flotilla, and reinforcing it, in order to relieve the ceaseless strain and overwork to which the vessels and personnel were being subjected; a strain which could not but reflect on efficiency and continue to augment the percentage out of action. It was invidious to take one day and call it a typical day, and make comparisons, without taking into account the fact that the flotilla included ten very old 30-knotters, two of which had been sent up to Immingham with a convoy, to be replaced by two P-boats, one of which ran into some mined nets on her way down, and had to be paid off, as she was so severely damaged; and the other arrived with machinery defects and was due for a refit. Of the remaining eight 30-knotters, two had been damaged in a heavy gale, in Dunkirk harbour; five were having machinery defects made good, and only one was available for service, which emphasised the necessity for replacing these old worn-out vessels.

There were six "Tribals" in the flotilla, and of this class, which was also worn out and gave constant trouble, four were out of action. The *Afridi* had been away refitting for nearly two months, the *Zubian* and *Viking* had been run into by merchantmen, the latter while she was at anchor. Of 18 modern

destroyers in the flotilla, six were out of action, which was not a high percentage, having regard to the fact that two of these were damaged by grounding in abnormally low water in Dover Harbour, through no fault of their own.

Apart from the age of half the flotilla, all the destroyers suffered from sand getting into their condensers, due to working from Dunkirk in very shallow water. Owing to lack of docking accommodation and dockyard labour, anything in the way of a large repair had to be effected temporarily and then taken in hand elsewhere. Vessels of the patrol were refitting at London, Immingham, Hull and Portsmouth. Navigational difficulties were probably greater than in any other locality in the United Kingdom; the shoal water off the Belgian coast and in Dover Harbour, the congested state of the latter, and collisions while carrying out convoy duties after dark at high speed were responsible for many casualties. No other flotilla was so continuously employed in high speed convoy work during the day, and kept ready for immediate action all night.

I concluded by saying that their Lordships had, in fact, stated an excellent case in support of my contention, and I trusted that they would now reconsider their decision, and send me the reinforcements I had asked for, at any rate until the anti-submarine measures in course of preparation were completed.

This outburst had a good effect, a division of Harwich destroyers came to my assistance in the dark periods, until new vessels were available to join the Patrol.

On 19th March an under-water explosion was heard in the minefield; oil was seen rising and a number of depth charges were dropped there; quantities of oil came to the surface and continued to do so for two days. It was considered certain that a submarine had been destroyed, and the Admiralty paid £1,000 prize-money to two drifters; but the submarine was not actually identified.

Two officers who were on the Staff when I arrived at Dover were able to tell me a good deal about the previous bombardments, which had been carried out on the Belgian coast, Commander Fraser, who was employed to fix the firing position, and Captain H. C. Grant, a gunnery officer, at that time in

charge of the Intelligence Office. They remained on and were a great help to me.

There were very few bombardments in 1917, but these were very elaborate affairs; The first took place on 12th May, after nearly three months' preparation and three false starts. Long delays occurred, waiting for exactly the right conditions—which emphasised the difficulties of carrying out operations entirely dependent on definite conditions of wind and weather, and when to these essentials were added a necessary state of tide, the co-operation of aircraft, or synchronisation with a certain phase of a great military campaign, the odds against actually carrying out the most ingeniously devised plan became almost overwhelming.

The night before the bombardment, Commander Fraser left North Goodwin buoy in a destroyer, with orders to proceed at high speed towards Zeebrugge and drop a buoy in a certain position, then run on until he was within a mile and half of Zeebrugge Mole, when he was to return to the buoy to check its position.

The official report stated that the position of this buoy: "Although laid within 500 yards of the desired spot, during the 50-mile run from the Goodwin, was nearly two miles out in the 13-mile run from the Zeebrugge Mole." The discrepancy being due to variations in the speed of the destroyer, and steaming through shoal water. The range, which was estimated to be 26,000 yards, was found to be actually only 22,000 yards.

The firing commenced after the aeroplanes had been in the air two and three-quarter hours, and after 75 rounds had been fired, the spotting aeroplanes had to return to their base through lack of petrol; 185 rounds were fired in all, and aerial photographs showed that only 40 of these had fallen in the neighbourhood of the entrance to the Bruges Canal, but some were quite close to the lock gates, the object of the attack.

Another bombardment was carried out at Ostend on the 5th June, 1917, after nearly three weeks' delay on account of weather. On this occasion Commander Fraser was sent in a destroyer, with another in company, to sight the Ostend Naval Base, then steam out and lay a buoy in the bombarding position. But the two vessels had to retire before a superior force of enemy destroyers, and the monitors had to take up their positions by

dead reckoning, 115 shells were fired. The Official Historian states :

“ Of these, about 20 exploded in or near the dockyard ; the reports from our Intelligence Officers asserted that the workshops had not been much damaged, but that a lighter and a *U.C.*-boat had been sunk, and that three destroyers of the flotilla, which were lying alongside the quays, were damaged. Our intelligence reports also stated that the bombardment had caused very great anxiety and had made the German Command doubt, very seriously, whether Ostend was suitable as a destroyer base at all. This was probably an exaggeration ; but there can be little doubt that if Admiral Bacon had been able to repeat these operations at short intervals, the increasing damage would very much have hampered and obstructed German operations from the Flanders bases. Unfortunately, the extraordinary difficulties of the operation made successive repetitions of it impossible. Admiral Bacon was anxious to follow up his first experiments and arranged for a series of further operations. They were constantly postponed because one or more of the conditions necessary to a successful bombardment was lacking ; and when, months later, the bombardments were renewed, the Germans had had plenty of time to make good the damage they had suffered and to strengthen their defences.”\*

I was anxious to have the monitors organised and trained to open fire at very short notice by night or day—as our ships did off Gallipoli, where they had to drop shells in close proximity to our own troops, so that accurate firing and gun ranges were essential. It seemed to me equally important off the Belgian coast, to avoid the risk of killing Belgians and destroying Belgian property ; so I set my experts to work, to carefully examine the records of these bombardments, with a view of devising more efficient methods.

Captain Douglas reported to me that although there were small scale navigational charts of the Belgian coast, there were no charts available for bombardment purposes, and the necessity

\* “ Naval Operations,” Vol. V, pages 47 and 48. The new batteries included Jacobynessen, four 15-inch guns with a range of 42,000 yards.



for these was apparent from our experience in the Dardanelles campaign. The relative positions of ship and target were not known, and no appliances existed for accurately laying the guns at night, or when out of sight of land. Further, much valuable time was wasted in spotting the guns on to the target by aircraft, and this gave the enemy time to lay smoke-screens before effective results had been obtained.

Captain Douglas and Lieut.-Commander Haselfoot then set to work with the greatest energy, and from accurate data supplied by the Belgian and French authorities and our own Admiralty, they made new large scale charts, giving the accurate latitude and longitude of all the enemy batteries, emplacements, searchlight stations and observation posts, as well as all navigational marks and soundings.

This entailed much work within easy reach of the enemy's destroyers, and often within range of his powerful batteries, consequently it had to be carried out under the protection of the vessels patrolling the Belgian coast, generally a 15-inch monitor, a small monitor, destroyers and the ubiquitous M.L.s—ever ready to make smoke-screens to hide our proceedings from the vigilant coast batteries.

Douglas also produced a diagram, by means of which, given the position of a bombarding monitor, and the latitude and longitude of the target, the range and bearing could be determined, without reference to the chart. Commander Altham's gyro director enabled monitor guns to be laid on any true bearing, without the necessity of aiming marks, thus enabling them to fire at night, and under way, out of sight of land.

On 28th February, I was able to issue new instructions for coast bombardments, which embodied this information, our Gallipoli experience, and that of the monitor Captains, who had been working on the Belgian coast during the past two years.

One of my chief concerns was to provide the Commodore at Dunkirk with sufficient vessels to carry out the duties confided to him, and I always tried to arrange for a destroyer leader and three or four destroyers to be at anchor in Dunkirk Roads, with steam on their engines and slips on their cables, during the dark night periods. The French destroyers, which had been placed

under my orders, usually worked with this division, or on the Eastern Barrage Patrol.

On the night of the 21st March, the *Swift* and three destroyers were on the Eastern Barrage Patrol. The *Botha* (Commander Roger Rede) was off the coast between Ostend and Blankenberghe, with Captain Douglas and Lieut.-Commander Haselfoot on board, carrying out surveying operations, which were materially helped by the enemy making considerable use of their searchlights, the positions of which by then were known to us with absolute accuracy. The *Morris* (Lieut.-Commander P. R. Percival), the French destroyers *Capitaine Mehl*, *Magon* and *Bouclier*, were at the ready in Dunkirk Roads. The *Terror*, M25, and the French destroyer *Oriflamme*, were in the Potje off La Panne. The *General Craufurd* was in Dunkirk Harbour, and M26, M.L.s, drifters, minesweepers and other small subsidiary vessels, were in the shallow-water anchorage outside the harbour, having cleared out to avoid an air raid.

The *Botha* returned with the two surveying officers about midnight, but owing to a smoke-screen, put up by the French on account of the air raid, was unable to land them. She was anchored in the Roads, when at 3.50 a.m. enemy vessels opened fire with star-shell and shell simultaneously from three positions. Commander Rede immediately slipped his cable, opened fire with star-shell to locate the enemy, and signalling to his division to follow the *Botha*, went full speed to the north-eastward, to cut them off from their base, regardless of the barrage fire of the French shore defences, laid across the Zuidcoote Pass, through which he had to go. The *Terror* (Captain C. W. Bruton) slipped and fired star-shell, which disclosed a division of four destroyers, on which she opened fire with her six-inch guns. Lieutenant B. R. Willett in *CMB20*, the only one available, proceeded in pursuit of the enemy.

The various reports of the action which ensued were rather conflicting, but Captain Douglas and Lieut.-Commander Haselfoot were able to follow the engagement without distraction, and their account and the enemy's operation orders—a copy of which was found on a prisoner—helped to make a clear picture of what had occurred.

The German attack was evidently intended to synchronise with the great offensive, which opened on the Western Front



preceded by four "A" class torpedo-boats, working in pairs, which were to mark two positions, through which the bombarding groups were to pass. At daylight there was to be an aerial reconnaissance.

The enemy evidently did not give our destroyers credit for getting under way so promptly, and—as on the night of 14th–15th February—they certainly did not mean to fight our destroyers if they could be avoided, for they were in full flight to the eastward, after a bombardment of only ten minutes, when the *Botha's* division converged on their line of retreat. By this time only the rear of the German force was within reach, i.e. five destroyers, followed by the two torpedo-boats, which had been anchored on the western mark. Prisoners reported that the latter had hurriedly got under way when they saw our destroyers approaching.

The British and French destroyers opened a heavy fire, which the Germans returned, mainly at the *Botha*, whose speed was reduced by a shell which cut a steam pipe in her stokehold; finding the enemy drawing ahead, Commander Rede swung his ship to port, fired two torpedoes and tried to ram the last destroyer, but owing to his lack of speed, she evaded him and the destroyers escaped ahead of the *Botha*, under cover of a smoke-screen; so he turned towards the two torpedo-boats, which were unable to keep up with their consorts and had been abandoned to their fate by Albrecht, though his command was vastly superior to the Allied division which was striving to bring him to action—or indeed to any unit we could oppose to him. The *Botha* succeeded in ramming the leading torpedo-boat (A19) amidships, cutting her completely in half, the two portions passing down either side of her, as she continued on her course. Rede then tried to ram the second torpedo-boat, but could not turn quickly enough; however, the *Botha* smothered her with a devastating fire as she passed.

The *Morris* also tried to ram this torpedo-boat but missed her, she then lost touch with the *Botha*, and proceeding to the eastward through the enemy's smoke-screen, sighted an enemy destroyer, which she engaged and claimed to have torpedoed. The French destroyers, which had been following in the wake of the *Botha*, lost sight of her in the smoke-screen, and when she next appeared, she was on the opposite course; her efforts to

ram having carried her through an arc of about 180 degrees. Captain Parseval of the *Capitaine Mehl*, thought he recognised her, but unfortunately the circuit of the *Botha's* fighting lights had been shot away during her action with the German destroyers, and the officer in charge of the torpedo tube, seeing a large destroyer without the British fighting lights, fired a torpedo at her, which struck the *Botha* in her after stokehold and brought her to. The French vessels then completed the destruction of *A7* and picked up an officer and six men, the sole survivors of the two unlucky torpedo-boats. The *Botha* was taken in tow by the *Morris* as dawn was breaking, the French destroyers formed a screen in rear, and the monitors and destroyers of the Eastern Barrage Patrol moved up to cover the withdrawal.

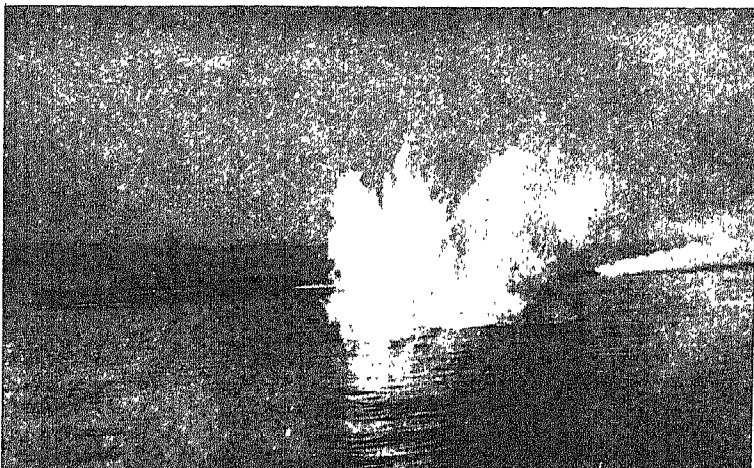
In the meantime *CMB20* was in hot pursuit of the enemy, Lieutenant Willett, sighting five destroyers off Ostend steaming at high speed to the eastward, most gallantly pressed on to within 600 yards, and fired a torpedo, which he reported, hit the fourth destroyer in the line. A tremendous fire was opened on him, but he managed to escape under cover of a smoke-screen, and was unable to observe the effect of his torpedo.

Our reconnaissance and fighting machines went up at dawn and fell in with the German aircraft, which were carrying out the reconnaissance in accordance with their operation orders; they destroyed four and put the remainder to flight.

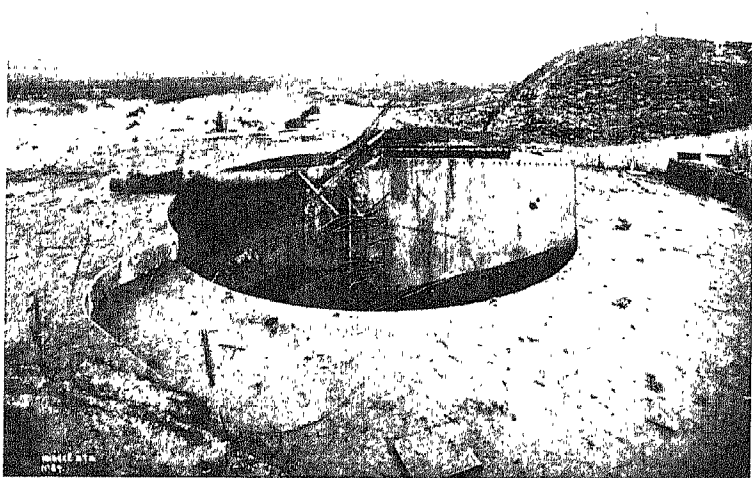
It was very difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the claims of the *Morris* and *CMB20*, but our aircraft reported that they saw nine destroyers circling round one that was apparently damaged, five miles north-west of Ostend, and a large patch of oil three miles north of Blankenberghe.

Commodore Lynes, in reporting the action to me on the telephone, suggested that we should bombard Ostend, into which some of the enemy had fled; I gave orders for the *Terror* to do so that afternoon, and embarked at once in the destroyer *Phæbe* to watch the proceedings.

The *Terror*, with Commodore Lynes on board, accompanied by destroyers, M.L.s for smoke-screening, and preceded by mine-sweepers, arrived at the firing position—26,500 yards from the naval base at Ostend—at 3 p.m. and opened fire with 15-inch shell. Her position was known to within a few yards, thanks to the good work of my surveying officers; the *Terror* found



SHELLS FROM GERMAN BATTERY FALLING NEAR MONITOR AND  
M.L. MAKING SMOKE SCREEN



12-IN. GUN OF KAISER WILHELM II BATTERY, KNOCKE



her target, which was out of sight, with wonderful rapidity and precision. Our aircraft—who had a very decisive command of the air—spotted for her and they also drove off the enemy's spotting machines; nevertheless the 15-inch battery at Jakobynessen replied with surprising accuracy, and my local expert thought they must have some system of sound ranging. Great fountains of spray shot up higher than the *Terror's* masthead, quite close to her and the M.L.s, so I directed the Captain of the *Phabe* (Lieut.-Commander E. Gore Langton) to lay a black funnel smoke-screen, along the line of the white phosphorous screen being made by the M.L.s, to hide the smoke of the *Terror's* gunfire, in case it could be seen above the M.L.s' screen, which was lying rather low.

The angle of descent of the enemy's shells, fired at such long range, was very steep, and coming out of the sky like bombs from an aeroplane, the odds against being hit were very high, there being so much more water than target, a comforting thought, for one of these plunging shell would have blown up the *Terror*, if it had fallen above her magazine or shell-room, as she was lightly armoured; and of course it would have destroyed a motor launch. However, the chief concern of the M.L.s' crews was to pick up the fish, large quantities of which came to the surface, stunned or killed by the explosion of the enemy's shells.

After a time, the enemy managed to cover the whole of our target with a smoke-screen, and our aircraft were no longer able to spot. I was very anxious not to run any risk of damaging Ostend, so after firing 39 rounds weighing about 34 tons, we withdrew. The shells all fell into the naval base or basin—as was proved by aerial photographs next day.

On the way back to Dunkirk, I picked up Commodore Lynes and Captain Douglas, the latter had managed to transfer from the *Botha* to the *Terror* in time for this engagement, and he gave me a very interesting account of his experiences during the last few hours.

On landing I visited the *Botha*, *Morris*, *CMB20* and the three French destroyers, and told the officers and ships' companies how much I appreciated their efforts. I complimented and thanked the French Captains for their loyal co-operation, without referring to the torpedoing of the *Botha*, as the matter at that time was still in doubt. Fortunately Captain Boisanger—who



commanded the French destroyer flotilla—was an old friend of Gallipoli days, having been Beach Master on “V” Beach at Helles, and this, and his friendship with Lynes, who was very popular with the French, eased a difficult situation, for the atmosphere at Dunkirk had become rather frigid. The *Capitaine Mehl* and the *Morris* having both claimed to have torpedoed a large German destroyer, each hoped that the other was the one that had torpedoed the *Botha*. When the identity of the torpedo was established, by the finding of a piece marked Creusot (the French torpedo factory) in the stokehold of the *Botha*, I assured Admiral Ronarc’h and the French commanding officers that such mistakes were inevitable in the confusion of a night action, and what we valued was the gallant good comradeship displayed by the French destroyers, in following ours through the barrage fire of the shore batteries, to attack an obviously superior enemy. The incident, indeed, only strengthened the bonds which united our navies.

I directed Commodore Lambe to bomb the Bruges Naval Base as heavily as possible, and our splendid Handley-Page night bombers—the most powerful in the world at that date—dropped three and a half tons of bombs on it during the night.

Our losses during the destroyer action amounted to 13 killed and eight wounded in the *Botha*, and two wounded in the *Morris*. Four men and a woman were killed and ten wounded on shore by the bombardment.

This little engagement was a godsend to the Dover Patrol, for it re-established the good relations between the Navy and the fishermen, who had been feeling rather sore, but they now declared that their losses in the last raid had been fully avenged by the Navy.

## CHAPTER XVI

### FOREWORD TO BELGIAN COAST OFFENSIVE

Objectives ; Views of American naval officers ; My object.

THE operations on the Belgian coast, which I initiated on the 3rd December, 1917, were part of an offensive to overcome the submarine menace, and were planned under my directions after the 1st January, 1918, and executed by me in April and May, 1918. They have been so widely advertised, the objects have been so misunderstood and misrepresented, and the results have been both exaggerated and minimised, so I propose to relate the facts, based on records which were placed in the official archives after the War, in order to clear some misconceptions and record what actually occurred.

When I became Director of Plans and took a hand in the anti-submarine campaign in October, 1917, it seemed to me vitally important, not only to make the passage of the Dover Straits dangerous to submarines, but to strike at the root of the evil, by attempting to block the sea exits from Bruges, which the Germans had developed into a most formidable and well-equipped base for destroyers and submarines.

Zeebrugge harbour was connected by a ship-canal with the inland docks at Bruges, which communicated again by means of smaller canals with Ostend harbour. The whole formed a triangle with two sea entrances. The eastern side, which was eight miles long, was the ship-canal from Zeebrugge to Bruges ; the southern side, which was 11 miles long, consisted of the smaller canals from Bruges to Ostend ; the base, running north-east, was the 12 miles of heavily fortified coast line between Ostend and Zeebrugge. This fortified line was prolonged eight and a half miles to the westward, extending to the right flank of the German Army, facing Nieuport, and seven miles

to the eastward as far as the Dutch frontier. The defences included a number of batteries mounting over 225 guns, 136 of which were from six-inch to 15-inch calibre, the latter ranging up to 42,000 yards.

This formidable system had been installed since the German occupation in 1914, and it was believed that Bruges provided a base for at least 35 enemy torpedo craft and about 30 submarines. By reason of its position and comparative security, it constituted a continual and ever-increasing menace to the sea communications of our Army, and to the sea-borne trade and food supplies of the United Kingdom.

The main objects of the enterprise, therefore, were to block the Bruges ship-canal at its entrance into the harbour at Zeebrugge; to block the entrance to Ostend harbour from the sea; and to inflict as much damage as possible upon the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend.

When the operations were undertaken, it was believed that although the blocking of the Zeebrugge entrance was the most important of all objects, it would be necessary also to block the entrance to Ostend harbour, in order to seal up the Bruges ship-canal and docks, for unless this was done the lighter craft would still be able to pass to and fro, more or less freely, through the smaller canals.

The name Zeebrugge has become so intimately connected with the operation, that it does not appear to be generally appreciated (even by the official naval historian) that our efforts were directed against Bruges. Zeebrugge itself could never have been blocked, and however successful our operation might have been, Zeebrugge Mole would have continued to provide an impregnable defended shelter for operations against our sea communications. My object was to cut Zeebrugge off from the docks, submarine shelters and repair shops, several miles inland, on which the enemy were dependent for the maintenance of their flotillas. If these objects could be achieved, the vessels working from Zeebrugge would be dependent for repair and upkeep on the bases in the Heligoland Bight, 150 miles away.

Of course Admiral Bacon fully appreciated the importance of Bruges, but his unsuccessful attempt to destroy the canal lock gates at Zeebrugge, by bombardment at a range of 22,000

yards, in May, 1917, had not been repeated (*see* page 190). His suggestion to train a C.M.B. to torpedo the lock gates had apparently been dropped, and when the proposal to attempt to block the exits at Zeebrugge and Ostend was revived, he evolved a scheme for bombarding the lock gates, under conditions infinitely more difficult to carry out than the long-range bombardment of 12th May, 1917, which he took months to organise and postponed time after time, while waiting for exactly the right weather. I do not think his new project had any more prospect of being carried out than its many ingenious predecessors.

One point which does not appear to have been taken into account in these bombardments—apart from the enormous odds against destroying a lock gate, was that unless *both* lock gates were destroyed, a good level of water could be maintained at Bruges, and the ship canal could be opened for at least two or three hours out of every 24. One lock gate was certain to be run back under its great concrete shelter as soon as the bombardment threatened, under any condition of tide; and in Admiral Bacon's last scheme, since the bombardment from alongside the Mole had to be carried out about high water, both lock gates would certainly have been run back under their shelters directly the attack developed.

Admiral Bacon tells us that he intended to bombard Bruges and the lock-gates at Zeebrugge with three monitors, moored behind a smoke-screen, 24,000 yards from the latter. Each monitor would have one 18-inch gun, for which he had designed a special mounting. One of these vessels joined the Patrol just before the end of the War.

Another of his schemes, which he has described in great detail, was to land an 18-inch gun (70 feet long, weighing 150 tons) directly after Westende was captured by his "Great Landing." The gun and its mounting were to be carried across the Channel on the bulges of a monitor, transferred to one of his special pontoons, landed during the night and transported to the Palace Hotel at Westende, where it was to be mounted *inside* the hotel, which was to camouflage the erection of the gun position. The gun was then to bombard the lock-gates at Zeebrugge and the naval base at Bruges. "The shooting of the 18-inch guns from shore emplacements

should have been so accurate that the destruction of the lock-gates should have been a matter of comparatively few rounds.”\*

This scheme got beyond paper ; there was a working model installed in the Flag Lieutenant's office (which incidentally gave him no room to work) until, much to his relief, I had it removed.

I was under the impression, until I read Admiral Bacon's book recently, that when he showed me this model, the day I succeeded him, he told me he intended to mount the gun in the Casino on the Plage at Ostend.

I have often wondered since, why so much time, thought and expense, were devoted to the “Great Landing” and this project. I took an early opportunity of discussing these operations with Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson—the C.I.G.S.—in case the conditions, which led up to the idea of the “Great Landing,” should recur. I asked them if they had any doubt as to the fate which awaited the 1st Division, if landed in that hornet's nest.

They both assured me that there was never any question of a landing in the face of opposition. The enterprise would not be launched until Roulers was captured, and when Roulers fell, the Flanders coast, Ostend, Zeebrugge and Bruges, would automatically be abandoned by the Germans. (This actually occurred in October, 1918.) The object of the landing, they said, was to get a division on the left flank of the Army, beyond the flooded area, as soon as possible. I could not refrain from saying that, if that was all, it seemed hardly worth while to segregate a division and several ships for three months, and spend vast sums on special vessels and fittings for such a purpose. In an unopposed landing the division might have been disembarked, complete with all its equipment, in a few hours, with ordinary naval transport.

Meanwhile the Army was nowhere near Roulers ; the lock-gates at Zeebrugge, which had been left alone for many months, were still serving Bruges. All these schemes which never were, and never could have been, translated into action, got us no nearer the solution of the problem, which was immediate ; and so I set to work to prepare for an attack, which, given

\* “The Dover Patrol, 1915-17,” pages 204-207.

certain essential conditions, might be delivered, and, given a little luck, might achieve decisive results.

An American naval officer, in an interesting and appreciative account of the operation, says :

“ History did not record the success of a single blocking attack ; even with the best laid plans it must have been doubtful whether this one would effect any material results ; we think that there was another idea, another purpose, in making such a bold, almost reckless, attack. An old letter by Wolfe gives us the key. ‘ In particular circumstances and times,’ he wrote, ‘ the loss of 1,000 men is rather an advantage to a nation than otherwise, seeing that gallant attempts raise its reputation, whereas the contrary appearances sink the credit of a country, ruin the troops and create infinite uneasiness at home.’ Thus we conceive that the real primary mission of the enterprise was to revive the *morale* of the British Empire. This idea must have predominated more and more after the terrible defeats of March and April. Visualise the situation which existed in April, 1918. Had not there occurred one of those combinations of ‘ particular circumstances and times ’ of which Wolfe had written ? ”\*

Another American naval officer, apparently accepting this view, writes :

“ It is said that both the German and British Armies taunted their Naval comrades for their inaction, and it is true that one of the motives for the Naval attacks was a desire on the part of some high spirited British naval officers to show the willingness of the British Navy to accept some losses. Under the conditions existing in 1918, with their enormous Naval superiority, it was possible for the Allies to accept heavy Naval loss with equanimity, But ordinarily, when the Naval balance is more even, it would be pure folly for a nation to indulge in Naval

\* “ The Attack on Zeebrugge,” by Lieut.-Commander H. H. Frost, U.S.N., in “ United States Naval Institute Proceedings,” March, 1929.

blood-letting to convince its Army that their Naval colleagues were willing to take their proper share of knocks.”\*

Admiral Bacon has told us his reasons for proposing to carry out the operation, in spite of his belief that blocking would be a farce (*see* pages 133 and 134).

I wish to place on record that I undertook these operations for military reasons, i.e. to defeat the submarine menace by every means in my power, without any unavoidable delay, and without again calling upon the Army to make further sacrifices to capture the German naval bases.

\* “High Command in the World War,” by Captain W. D. Puleston, U.S.N., page 305.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ORGANISATION OF "Z.O." PLAN

Admiral Bacon's advice ; Reject monitor plan ; Boarding and blocking ships selected ; Importance of smoke ; Enlist Wing-Commander Brock's services ; Explain my plan to Sea Lords ; Admiralty approval.

ADMIRAL BACON had been given a free hand by Admiral Jellicoe on 18th December, 1917, to prepare plans for the attempt to block the entrances of the Bruges Canal at Zeebrugge and Ostend with cruiser blockships, and to carry out any other offensive action he thought fit, which might interfere with the free use of the Bruges naval base by enemy vessels.

When I assumed command of the Dover Patrol a fortnight later, and was given a free hand by Admiral Wemyss to carry out the operation, in any way I thought fit, the following action had been taken.

With the approval of Admiral Jellicoe (as Director of Plans), I had visited Admiral Beatty to ask him to lend officers and men of the Grand Fleet, to form a landing party for the assault of Zeebrugge Mole. Admiral Beatty had readily agreed, and Admiral Jellicoe had approved of bluejackets and marines being employed, instead of the troops that Admiral Bacon had intended to borrow from the Army ; but beyond my visit to the Grand Fleet, no steps had been taken to organise or train the force.

Admiral Jellicoe had directed me to find the necessary blockships, and I had submitted the result of our investigations to the new First Sea Lord, a few days after Admiral Jellicoe had left the Admiralty, but no decision was made until after I went to Dover, owing to Admiral Wemyss' absence in the Grand Fleet.

Admiral Jellicoe had no further share in the preparations, and no responsibility whatever for the operations, which were actually carried out four months later.

The Third Sea Lord—Rear-Admiral Halsey—had requested the Director of Naval Construction to work out Admiral Bacon's



plan for building a false collapsible bow, and the great landing brow for a 12-inch monitor.

The Director of Naval Ordnance had been requested to prepare special reduced charges, to enable the 12-inch guns of another monitor to bombard the lock gates at short range.

Admiral Bacon had prepared a plan to illustrate his scheme for providing smoke-screens to cover the operation, and this I found in my office after he left. I would like to place on record my acknowledgment of Admiral Bacon's efforts to help me. He left pinned on the walls of my office, the following quotation from a despatch of Lord Nelson, with reference to an attack on Flushing when Nelson was Admiral of the Dover Patrol: "I cannot but admire Captain Owen's zeal, or his anxious desire to get at the enemy, but I am afraid that it has made him overleap sandbanks and tides, and laid him aboard the enemy. I could join him most heartily in his desire, but we cannot do impossibilities, and I am as little used to find out impossibilities as most folk, and I think I can discriminate between the impracticable and the fair prospect of success."

Other quotations included one of Frederick the Great's sayings: "If I thought my coat knew my plans, I would take it off and burn it." Another was: "The essence of strategy is forethought, the essence of tactics is surprise."

During my first week at Dover the following quotations appeared in the office calendar: "It is thought combined with energy, preparation combined with aggressiveness, knowledge combined with application, that overcomes obstacles and makes achievements sure"; and "Executives must not try to do too much themselves. Their power will lie in duplicating themselves by the selection of lieutenants." I thought these might also be helpful and pinned them below the others.

On the 10th January, 1918, Admiral Bacon wrote me the following letter:

*Operation I.* The chief difficulty is hitting the exact spot. Several checks will be required.

Taut wire gear—but difficulty lies in running this across the tide. The position from the occulting light-buoy can be fixed by this method *en passant*. This necessitates fixing

the occulting light-buoy shortly before. The Hun may move it slightly. Watch this, and above all fix it by a method that does not attract attention. Leave no detail to chance. Kite balloon towed by destroyer may be useful to see over smoke. Flares dropped from aeroplanes will be rough guide. Navigate in by dropping moored light-buoys from surveying P-boat astern of leader. Leader should form a column with nothing astern of her.

Charges should be special. Those for lock gates so that 5° elevation gives 2,000 yards range—present special charges will do for seaplane base—six-inch require special charges also.

Think out thoroughly pros and cons of searchlights and flares, and where and how to use them.

I consider the landing best arranged by holding a defensive line just to westward of western of the two eastern large sheds. Only let raiding party go beyond this to sink dredger. Otherwise you will hamper the use of heavy gunfire. The use of the defensive line is to cut off support from Mole end. Machine-guns with good bullet-proof shields will be required, and sandbags for protection from bombs. The line should include the coal dump. Speed of jumping is everything. Exercise great discretion as to when you commence smoke—wind speed and direction distance from Mole, etc., govern this. Remember it will take five seconds to form a screen. Everything depends on hiding the main operation. Have a diversion, therefore, with destroyers to give a false idea. For same reason fire at the batteries that do not enfilade main attack. In any case you won't hit them, so give a false impression by firing at the wrong ones. Give the idea that the attack is to the eastward of the Mole. As regards control of fire, I have my own views which I would have carried out; but your experts are sure to differ, so you had better follow their cast-iron methods.

Of course there are hundreds of points. Spend three hours daily (separate hours preferably) going through the operation in your mind step by step, varying position of first alarm, etc., with different wind and smoke boat casualties, and put yourself in the Bosch place and see

how you would counter if you guessed the attack, and how you would act if you did not guess the attack, and also if you had to change from one counter to another; and their difficulties, and see how you can increase those difficulties. This will strengthen your attack and at the same time give you a better idea while the show is in progress of what is in the Bosch mind.

*Operation II.*—The Bombardment of Bruges by 18-inch guns. Essentials: command of the air—get this by relays.

Fire along the canal so that direction can be corrected even with a smoke-screen by dropping the range and ranging corrected by dropping to an ascertained mark. Have several, as the Bosch will tumble to the method. Have at least six secondary marks of varied range or direction to which one ship can drop to correct for the others. Treat all three ships as one battery. Range with all ships, each ship using the correction of the other. Then for secondary re-ranging use one ship only. Fire out the life of the gun.

Try, unless you have other data, 25 yards loss per round for extra big charge each round.

Fire on Zeebrugge or Knocke with 15-inch at same time.

Dear Keyes,

10/1/18.

The above rough notes may be of use to you. They are quite rough, but you may find some of the hints useful.

Yours sincerely,

R. H. BACON."

Admiral Bacon has recorded that he offered to serve under me as my Chief of Staff and that I did not accept it. This was extraordinarily generous of him, but the offer never reached me, and I heard of it for the first time when I read his book in 1935.\*

Admiral Bacon also sent me an interesting letter from Commander Altham—the Captain of the *General Craufurd*—dated 29th December, 1917, which clearly shows that Altham was under the impression that his ship had been selected to ram the Mole, and not the *Sir John Moore* (as stated in the Official History and Admiral Bacon's book), but this is really immaterial,

\* "The Concise History of the Dover Patrol," page 272, f.n.

as Altham's letter and the reply which Admiral Bacon suggested that I should send to him, clearly proves that the "Plan" which developed later was really in a very elementary state at that date, though it is described in great detail in the "Dover Patrol, 1915-17" (published October, 1919, when details of what actually occurred were well known), and in still greater detail in the "Concise History of the Dover Patrol" (which was published after Volume V of the Official Naval History appeared in 1931).

Admiral Bacon's suggestions for finding the exact spot had all the disadvantages of his previous efforts to take up correct positions for bombardments in the past. I could not afford to run such risks, and thanks to the good offices of my surveying officers, I *knew* that positions could be found within a few yards and far more accurately, than by running taut wire gear across a strong tideway. I thought, too, that I could improve on his suggestions for the conduct of the operations on the Mole, so his letter of 10th January was not very helpful, and I really had to start my preparations almost from zero on the 1st January, 1918. However, his proposal to assault the Mole from the seaward side seemed to me an excellent idea, for the guns at the end of the Mole, which would have to be passed by the blockships at a range of under 100 yards, were a menace which might well defeat our object, and on that account, and that account only, I decided to embody the assault of the Mole in my plan.

I made inquiries as to what had actually been done towards fitting out the *General Craufurd* and the *Sir John Moore*, and learnt that the former was to be fitted with a platform on her mast as high as possible, to take two pom-poms, two or three machine-guns and a searchlight to work with them. The *Sir John Moore* was to be fitted with a false bow and a brow. A rough sketch had been supplied by Admiral Bacon showing the monitor and a section of the Mole, with the brow in a position hinged on the parapet and sloping down to the Mole. The bow had to be strong enough to withstand 1,000-ton shock. Beyond making calculations to ascertain the effect of these alterations on the two ships, nothing had been done. The two parts of the hinged brow were about 48 feet long and 12 feet wide to allow eight men abreast to walk up it. The constructors estimated that this would weigh 20 tons, i.e. ten tons

each portion. The outboard end was to be "flung over" the parapet, when the monitor's bow reached the Mole. I was told that details as to how the "flinging over" was to be accomplished were never worked out, but a naval constructor remarked to me that it would be easier to make arrangements for shedding the brow, when the monitor backed astern, than "flinging" ten tons over the parapet. The speed of the monitor, he said, would be four knots, only one or two more than the current sweeping along the Mole.\*

Admiral Bacon had a vivid imagination and a genius for invention, and could be relied upon to invent something to overcome any difficulty, but this project of his was fantastic, and it is almost incredible that it was ever seriously considered as an operation of war. I told Admiral Halsey that I did not require anything further to be done in the matter.

Nevertheless I was still very anxious to capture the guns at the end of the Mole, and I thought that the most suitable boarding ship would be a fast, handy, shallow draught vessel with high freeboard and stoutly built to go alongside quays, such as those running between Holyhead and Kingston, or on one of the other Irish cross-channel routes. I deputed Captain H. C. Grant to find me such a ship. After a few days he told me that nothing of the sort could be spared, so I decided to fit out the *Vindictive* as a boarding vessel. I had been squadron mates with her sister ship the *Arrogant*; they were specially built to attend on a fleet in action, take lame ducks in tow, and give the *coup de grace* to a damaged enemy by ramming; and I knew them to be the handiest ships in the Service.

The *Vindictive's* draught was against her, and she could hardly hope to escape hitting a mine if we ran into a minefield. So I sent Grant on the travel again, to look for a couple of sturdily-built ferry-boats—of a type one had so often seen bumping, or ramming their bows up against a quay, to nose themselves round in a tideway—to accompany the *Vindictive*. After visiting many ports he came back with photographs of the Mersey ferry-boats *Iris* and *Daffodil*. One was shown with an enormous gash in her side, after a collision which had cut her down to the waterline, but she was apparently quite buoyant

\* These details do not agree precisely with those given in Admiral Bacon's book, but are in the Admiralty records.

and was still carrying about 1,000 people. Having double hulls, these vessels were practically unsinkable, and drawing only 11 feet of water, they could be taken safely over any mine-field round about high water; so they were admirably suited for my purpose, and I asked the Admiralty to commandeer them. There was a great outcry on the Merseyside, but the Press was asked to refrain from comment, and it was put about that they were urgently required to go to America, to help to embark the American troops, which were being brought over by every available liner. The steel plating which was being fitted to protect them from machine-gun and shell fire, we said, was to make them more seaworthy for the passage across the Atlantic. We had to tell a great many stories in those days to keep our plans secret.

There was an immense amount of work to be done, but I hoped to be able to get it completed in time to deliver the attack between 13th and 17th March, when there would be no moon, and high water on the Belgian coast would be at a time, which would permit the expedition to approach during dark hours and withdraw before daybreak. These conditions only existed for four or five days each lunar month, and as it was also necessary to have a light wind blowing towards the shore, and a smooth sea for the armada of small vessels making smoke, and for the boarding ship to go alongside the Mole, all the essential conditions of moon, tide, wind and weather might never occur during the possible dark period.

I considered that our ability to deliver an attack at all, on that heavily fortified area, depended entirely on an effective smoke-screen to cover our approach until we were at close quarters. Admiral Bacon's efforts to baffle the flames, generated by the only means he had of making smoke, not having been successful, I enlisted the services of Wing-Commander Brock, R.N.A.S., without any delay. He had invented an incendiary bullet which was responsible for destroying several Zeppelins, and the flares which were proving of such immense value over the minefield, and I was assured that he could produce an effective smoke. So I took him fully into my confidence and during the weeks of preparation I saw him constantly, and his services were simply invaluable to me. He set to work with feverish energy, and sent down a party of three officers and

87 men (under the command of Lieutenant Graham Hewett, R.N.V.R.), from the R.N.A.S. Experimental Base, who were accommodated in the dockyard.

I studied Admiral Bacon's smoke chart with Brock, and he assured me that smoke did not cone as depicted, which he proved to me later, and he could offer no suggestion for baffling the glare generated by the phosphorus smoke. Admiral Bacon states in his book: "Phosphorus smoke was dense and persistent, and in the dark the burners glowed and lighted the whole length of the screen line and the low clouds, if there were any, with a dull red glare, so that the attention of the enemy was attracted to a long line and distracted from the region immediately opposite the breakwater."

I do not think that anyone, who actually took part in making smoke during our action on the Belgian coast, was under any illusion as to what his fate would have been, if this method of making smoke had been attempted within close range of numerous guns. It was all so different to anything the M.L.s had experienced before, their smoke making hitherto having been in daylight, at ranges of from 25,000 to 30,000 yards from the enemy guns.

Brock proved to me that he could produce a wonderful smoke, very similar to that used by the Germans, by introducing chlor-sulphonic acid into the engine exhausts of the C.M.B.s and M.L.s and the funnels of destroyers. He also suggested a method to obviate the slow, laborious approach, described in a memorandum of Admiral Bacon's which I had found in my office. "A screen of smoke will be made and maintained for five miles off the coast. The weather will be chosen when this will drift in at a rate of five to six miles an hour. The smoke vessels will follow up the line of smoke, steaming at 45 degrees to the coast, for short distances of about 500 yards, to keep up its volume."

Brock's suggestion was for the C.M.B.s to lay a smoke-screen at full speed to and fro across our line of approach, until they were close to the objective, behind which the M.L.s, at their utmost speed, and destroyers, could advance to take up their inshore positions. Experiments proved this method to be thoroughly effective, so I adopted it and gave Brock a free hand to fit out all the vessels taking part.

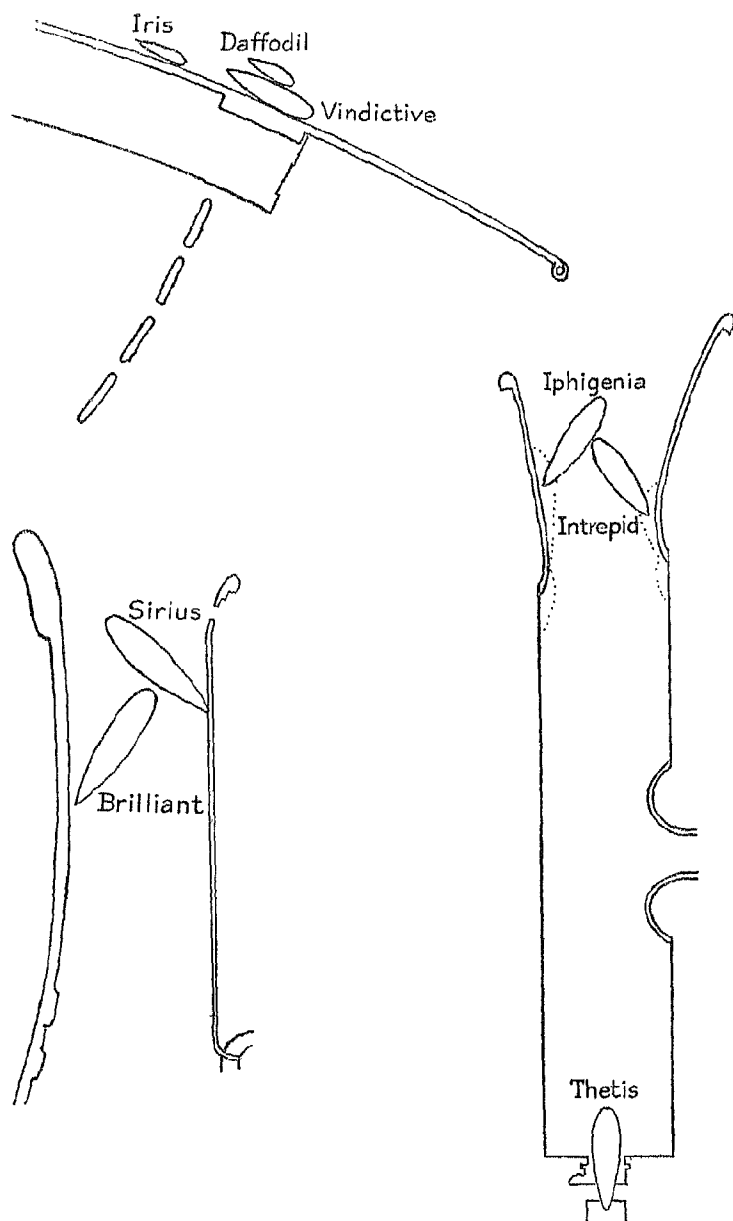
The *Vindictive* was originally intended to be an Ostend blockship, until I failed to find a suitable merchant vessel to act as boarding ship. This left five second-class cruisers, the *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, *Thetis*, *Brilliant* and *Sirius* (built under the Naval Defence Act of 1889). They were ordered to Chatham to be fitted out, nominally to act as blockships for Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, in case the enemy forced us to abandon the Channel ports, a threat which was regarded as a very real one, after the enemy's great offensive opened on the 21st March. These six ships had to be collected from various places, and there were exasperating delays before they all arrived, and early in March, I had to tell the Admiralty, that there was no prospect of our being able to deliver the attack in the March dark period, and I concentrated every effort to ensure being ready in every respect by the 10th April, the first night of the next dark period.

The garrison of the Mole was believed to be about 1,000 strong, and it was important to try and cut it off from reinforcements, so I deputed Lieut.-Commander F. Sandford to work out a scheme for destroying the steel viaduct which connected the stone Mole to the shore.

I had so many things to think about and do, in my efforts to wage war upon everything German within reach, and my Gallipoli experience had taught me the infinite value of clear, concise and well co-ordinated Staff work, to insure the success of an operation. Commodore Boyle was most fully occupied in the day to day work of the Patrol, the laying of new lines of mines, etc., and I wanted someone, versed in the drafting of orders, who would be free to devote all his attention to the Staff work, connected with the co-ordination of the work of the officers, who were engaged in preparing the various phases of my plans.

It was a great disappointment to me not to be able to obtain Major Godfrey's services. When I found that he could not be spared, I asked Captain Fuller, the Director of Plans, to lend me Commander A. Carpenter. He had been my Navigating Officer in the cruiser *Venus* and I knew him to be a well-trained Staff officer and an able navigator. When I was appointed Director of Plans, he begged me to take him on my Staff. I arranged this, and it happened that he had been employed,





The position of the blockships as shown above were inserted on aerial photographs, which accompanied the Plan, submitted to the Admiralty on 24th February, 1918.

working under Captain Pound, in the preparation of the Staff appreciation for the blocking of Zeebrugge and Ostend; so I thought he was the most suitable officer available for my purpose. Commander Carpenter's gift for going into the minutest details with the most meticulous care, greatly assisted me in preparing a detailed plan, and orders, which embodied the work of several officers.

I need hardly say that I received every sort of encouragement and backing from Sir Eric Geddes and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, who were responsible for giving me such a great opportunity, and when I had completed the plans the latter asked me to come up to the Admiralty and explain them to the Sea Lords. He has given his reasons for doing so as follows :

"There had been much complaint on the part of some former members of the Board, as to the manner in which they had been kept in entire ignorance of the proposals for the Gallipoli Campaign, claiming that as members of a corporate body they shared in the responsibility for the naval part of that—and other—operations. This question of responsibility had been the subject of much discussion between the First Lord and myself, and he laid down the principle, that for day to day operations, at any rate, the Staff Lords only should be responsible, a procedure in which all the Naval members of the Board had acquiesced, and which had, temporarily at any rate, satisfied me. But the question of an attack on Zeebrugge and Ostend was not a day to day operation and, moreover, was one which, if not successful, would bring a great deal of criticism on the Admiralty. I accordingly made up my mind to let my colleagues into the secret, which I was trying hard to keep from everyone. At a meeting of the Naval Lords in my room I put forward to them what it was proposed to do, and Admiral Keyes unfolded his detailed plan. Luckily there was no dissentient voice and I therefore was spared the difficulty of carrying out this operation against their wishes, which I had made up my mind to do in case of their disapproval.\*

\* "The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wemyss, Admiral of the Fleet," by Lady Wester Wemyss, pages 373 and 374.

I went to the Admiralty on the 24th February, and after being catechised for over two hours I was asked to leave the plan to be studied by the Sea Lords. Three aerial photographs accompanied the plan, on which the proposed positions of the boarding ships and blockships were inserted (*see* sketches, page 214). During this interview it was of great value to me to be able to affirm, that Admiral Jellicoe had approved of an attempt being made to block Zeebrugge and Ostend, for his prudent judgment was thoroughly appreciated by his former colleagues who were still on the Board.

A few days later the papers were returned to me, with the comments and general approval of Admirals Heath, Fremantle, Hope, Tothill and Halsey, who thenceforward shared with Sir Eric Geddes and Admiral Wemyss, the responsibility for approving the operation as it was carried out.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PERSONNEL

#### Selection of Commanding Officers and Leaders of Units.

DURING the weeks which preceded the Belgian Coast offensive, I was able to devote much of my time to going into every detail of the plan—the fitting out of the vessels, and the selection and training of the personnel. Admiral Dampier, Commodore Boyle and Captain Tomkinson, in one way or another, did everything in their power to lighten my task, by relieving me of all routine work, and seeing to it that every available vessel would be ready in all respects, and in good running order for the selected day. This was no easy matter, in view of the age of the majority of the destroyers and the many demands on the flotilla for escort work—particularly when the enemy's March offensive developed, and thousands of extra troops were rushed out to France and the usual transport work was more than doubled.

The selection and appointment of the personnel was of paramount importance, and I dealt personally with this from first to last.

Although the attacks on Zeebrugge and Ostend were to be synchronised and the blockships were all to sail in my company, I could not, of course, personally direct the attack on Ostend as well as that on Zeebrugge, and I confided the conduct of the Ostend operations to Commodore Hubert Lynes, and placed all the vessels he required under his command. He was fortunate to have as his principal Staff Officer, Commander J. L. C. Clark, who I had seen distinguishing himself in command of a destroyer during the Gallipoli Campaign.

Every ship, officer and man of the Dover Patrol, that could be spared from the minefield patrol, would be engaged off Zeebrugge or Ostend, mostly in small detached units, each with more or less independent functions to perform; so I went very carefully into the selection of the leaders of the units.

When I first arrived at Dover I was inclined to look upon my M.P.—Captain Ion Hamilton Benn—with some suspicion, especially when he asked for leave to attend Parliament; but I soon learnt to appreciate his value; he was an inspiration and example to the people in his M.L.s, who were devoted to him. I arranged that he should command the Ostend M.L.s, and Captain G. R. L. Edwards, who was in command of the M.L. Flotilla, those intended for Zeebrugge.

Lieutenant Welman, who commanded the C.M.B.s, despite his youth (he was only twenty-four) was an organiser of remarkable ability, and had already proved himself an enterprising leader; he suggested that he should lead the Zeebrugge C.M.B.s and his second in command, Lieutenant F. C. Harrison, those based on Dunkirk in the Ostend attack.

Soon after Commander Carpenter was lent to me, I sent him up to the Grand Fleet to explain my plan to Admiral Beatty, and to find out how many officers and men he could spare me. The Grand Fleet's contribution was far more generous than I had dared to hope for, and included executive and engineer officers, scamen, stokers and Marines, both Light Infantry and Artillery, but as the plan developed I found that I should want many more than I could expect to get from the Fleet, so I got into touch with my good neighbours at Portsmouth and the Nore, who were most generous and helpful.

Sir Stanley Colville undertook to complete the manning of the *Iris* and *Daffodil*, which were fitting out at Portsmouth. Sir Doveton Sturdee—who had succeeded Sir George Callaghan at the Nore—directed the Commodore of the Barracks (Vice-Admiral Seymour Erskine) to provide me with all the men I required.

It occurred to me that I might make use of some of the naval ratings manning the siege guns on the Belgian coast. Many of them had been ashore for about three years, and I thought they might well be employed afloat, if I could obtain R.M.A. to relieve them. I sent for Captain Halahan, gave him an idea of what I proposed to do, and asked him to find out how many of his men would like to take part in a hazardous enterprise.

Meanwhile I had been in communication with the Adjutant-General of Marines (General Sir David Mercer). On the 7th January, in answer to my suggestion that he might be able to

relieve the seamen by Marine Artillerymen, he wrote that he would do so, and went on to say that directly he received instructions from the Admiralty, he would form a battalion of three companies, one from each depot, and would send the Colonel who was to command it down to Dover to see me, and settle the nature of the special training I wished the battalion to be given.

On hearing that reliefs were available for his men, Halahan wrote :

“ May I say that if the operation for which you said you might want some of my men is eventually undertaken, I should very much like to take part in it. I would willingly accept the same conditions, viz., that I should not expect to come back.”

I then arranged for the naval siege guns to be manned entirely by R.M.A. and placed under the command of their Colonel.

Admiral Wemyss saw General Mercer a few days later, and gave him the necessary authority ; but I thought it very undesirable to keep the people who were taking part under training too long, and very important to keep the secret as long as possible.

The commencement of the training—which we agreed should not exceed about six weeks—was therefore governed by the date on which the blockships and boarding vessels would be ready, and, as it happened, by another essential condition, sufficient material being available for the production of smoke.

Captain Fuller acted as a liaison between me and the many departments at the Admiralty, and made it his business to see that I got everything I wanted. Among many other helpful services, he arranged that the officers I nominated should be sent down to Dover to be interviewed.

In the meantime I had been communicating with individual officers, to ask if they would like to take part in an enterprise I was organising. I felt that the service in blockships would be most hazardous and made up my mind only to employ unmarried officers and men. Amongst the first I wrote to was Commander A. E. Godsal of the *Centurion*.

Remembering a critical morning off the right flank of the French Army in Gallipoli, I selected Lieut.-Commander H. N. M.

Hardy, who had shown such initiative and who had borne himself so gallantly on that occasion.\*

I also asked the officers who were helping me so keenly if they would like to be represented in the blockships, and Admiral Beatty nominated Lieutenant Ivan Franks, who had commanded submarines and who had served under my brother Adrian in a "Q" ship. Fuller recommended Commander Ralph Sneyd, who had been with him in the Cameroons. Carpenter asked me to consider Lieutenant Bonham Carter.

It was very interesting to watch the reactions of the various officers—whom I interviewed singly—when I told them that the enterprise would be hazardous, and finally said that the best chance of escape I could offer them after it, was a German prison until the end of the War. With one exception only, they appeared to be simply delighted and most grateful for the honour I had done them in offering them such a wonderful prospect! Then I gave them an outline of the plan, and said that although I would make every endeavour to save them after they had sunk their ships, I felt that it was a very forlorn hope. They took everything for granted, asked few, if any, questions, and went away apparently full of joy and gratitude.

The one exception raised so many questions, ifs and buts, that I became impatient, and said that if he did not feel enthusiastic about it I had no wish to employ him, there were scores who would give anything to be given the chance I was offering him. He made it quite clear at once that he had no intention of allowing anyone else to have his place, but he would like to know what it was all for; so I told him what the submarine menace meant to the country, and how vitally important it was to use every means in our power to stop it. Finally I enlisted him, Ralph Sneyd, to lead the Zeebrugge blockships, and had every reason to be thankful for the choice.

I told the selected Captains that they would each have two officers, and they might suggest friends they could trust, as the command might well pass rapidly. Godsall at once asked for Victor Crutchley, and I was glad to be able to tell him that as I knew he would accept my offer, and would be certain to ask for Crutchley, I had already arranged for him to come, which pleased him very much.

\* Vol. I, page 323.

Franks asked for Billyard Leake, a submarine shipmate, who he assured me was one in a thousand—and so he proved. Franks was the first of the Commanding Officers to become available, as arrangements had to be made to relieve the others in the appointments they held. I sent him to Chatham at once to superintend the fitting out of the blockships, and he entered into it all with the greatest keenness and enthusiasm.

One day Lieut.-Commander R. Rosoman arrived at Dover, nominally to be First Lieutenant of the *Arrogant*, but strongly recommended to me as a stout fellow, a seaman and a good organiser, so I sent for him, took to him, and sent him off treading on air, to be First Lieutenant of the *Vindictive*. It would be difficult to exaggerate what the *Vindictive* and all on board her owed to him.

As the ships fitting out at Chatham were almost uninhabitable, I asked for the battleship *Hindustan* to act as a parent ship; she had just been paid off and was lying, with a skeleton crew, close to them in the dockyard. Admiral Wemyss approved, and I selected Captain A. P. Davidson—who I knew well as Captain of the *Cornwallis* throughout the Dardanelles Campaign—to command her. Since then the *Cornwallis* had been sunk by a submarine in the Mediterranean, and Davidson had been for some time in command of the R.N.A.S. Balloon Station at King's North.

When he reported to me, I made it quite clear that he would have no active part in the attack, but could be of the greatest use to me in looking after the people who were going to take part in the expedition. He begged me to apply for the Rev. C. Peshall, the Chaplain of his last command. "He would be," he wrote, "a spiritual force, and a fighting force, too, if you will let him." He was, and I was fortunate to secure his services.

Davidson also recommended me to take Lieut.-Commander Harrington Edwards, R.N.V.R., a one-eyed bearded warrior who had been all through the Gallipoli Campaign, and had since been badly wounded in France. Apparently he was resting to recuperate at the balloon station and was spoiling to get into the ring again. He had been through the mill of close trench fighting for the best part of three years, so I sent for him, and after a short conversation had no hesitation in selecting him for service with the naval assaulting force. I have recently



read some extracts from an account he wrote at the time. He certainly showed no signs of the doubts he appears to have had as to my sanity ; and of the many people to whom I unfolded the plan, I can think of no one who appeared to be more genuinely delighted at the thought of being allowed to take a hand, than that hardened warrior. In his account of the interview, Edwards says that after I had explained the plan to him I asked him what he thought of it.

“Phew, what did I think of it? My mind rapidly revolved round all the strikingly original, hopeless, brilliant, practically impossible schemes that I had been in, or nearly in, in the way of attacks on land, but never anything like this for rank, sheer madness and—yes—impertinence ; but there was the pleasant smile of a proud father on the Admiral’s face, and I could not tell him my real opinion, so I tried to get time, and asked : ‘What about the mines ; how will the ships ever get there?’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘you need not bother about that, the Navy will look after that ; what you have to think of is the landing part. Davidson said that you were all through Gallipoli and have had lots of experience, and it is your land experience I want, as the training of the landing party will be your job.’ . . . When I arrived back at Chatham I was full of it. I thought it was quite hopeless, but, oh my goodness, it was quite gloriously hopeless. It was desperate ; but I realised our position and the frightful losses the U-boats were inflicting on our shipping were also desperate. The boats engaged were of no great fighting value ; the officers and men? Ah! that was another matter. I went off to my cabin that night, but I could not sleep. How lucky I was to be in it.”

Captain Halahan came to Dover after he had handed over his guns to the R.M.A., and worked at the plan in my office and at Chatham, and on his recommendation I arranged for Lieutenant E. Hilton Young, R.N.V.R., who had been with the naval siege guns, to be appointed to the *Hindustan* for service in the *Vindictive*.

It will be remembered that I had insisted that the Captain of

the *Amazon*, Lieutenant Adam Ferguson, had been too leniently treated by the Court Martial which tried him, with the result that he was afterwards superseded. However, I attributed his failure to lack of experience rather than want of courage, and I felt sorry that so young an officer should have his future in the Navy damned at the outset of his career, so I sent for him and offered him an appointment in the *Vindictive*, which he gladly accepted.

Commodore Brand (Captain of the Fleet of the Grand Fleet) wrote to me :

“The Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, called upon the Flag Officers commanding squadrons to provide contingents of selected volunteers from the ships under their orders. They were to be stout-hearted men, active and keen, who could be depended upon in any emergency to do their very best, and having regard to the hazardous nature of the enterprise, wherever possible, unmarried or without dependants. Similarly the officers chosen were those whose powers of initiative and leadership were known to be high. The Flag Officers selected the officers and the Captains the petty officers and men.”

On the 24th February the Commander-in-Chief sent me a list of the officers of the Grand Fleet contingent.

Eight executive, eight engineer and two R.M.A. officers, 200 seamen, 210 stokers and 50 R.M.A. men joined the *Hindustan* on 1st March, and three officers and 150 N.C.O.s and men of the R.M.L.I. joined the 4th Battalion of the Royal Marines, which had been formed at Deal, on 25th February.

The Colonel who had been selected to command the battalion had visited me at Dover at the beginning of the month, but he was found medically unfit for service abroad, for which the battalion was ostensibly being formed. General Mercer then suggested that I should interview Major Elliot, who was to be second in command, and he said if I thought he would do he would appoint him to command, with the acting rank of Lieut.-Colonel.

Elliot came to Dover on the 12th February, and I do not think that he had any idea of what was really in the wind. I

took him through the plan, showed him the plans of the Mole, aerial photographs, etc., and asked him if he considered it a feasible operation and whether the thought of taking part in it appealed to him. He left me in no doubt as to that, so I said : "Then you think it a good enterprise, with a fair chance of success?" He replied that he did indeed. I told him that in that case he would command the battalion, with the acting rank of Lieut.-Colonel. I am sure that that had never entered his head for a moment; he was astonished and delighted, and during the weeks that followed, Elliot and Halahan worked in close co-operation on the plan of attack, and in constant touch with me.

In addition to the eight executive officers of the assaulting force, the Grand Fleet provided Commanders for the *Iris* and *Daffodil*. I attached the greatest importance to these two commands, and asked for Commander Valentine Gibbs, whom I had known well since he was a midshipman in the China War; and Lieutenant Harold Campbell, who was with me as First Lieutenant of the *Lurcher* in the action of the Heligoland Bight. I knew them both to be clear-headed, imperturbably cool and full of initiative.

I had originally intended to hoist my flag in the *Vindictive*, as I was anxious to see that she was berthed in the right place, to capture the guns at the end of the Mole before the blockships arrived. Carpenter, with whom I was in daily contact, begged me to take him with me, and knowing him to be a skilful ship handler, I promised to take him as my Flag Captain.

As the plan developed, however, I realised that I must be free to move about. There were three distinct phases in the plan and many scattered units, and so many things might happen during the approach; so I decided to fly my flag in the *Warwick* and lead a small unit of destroyers to follow the C.M.B.s and sweep ahead of the armada of boarding vessels, blockships and M.L.s, ready to deal with the enemy destroyers, which I thought would be certain to be out, particularly if they had any inkling that a considerable British force was at sea.

This put me in rather an awkward position in regard to the command of the *Vindictive*; there was no objection to a comparatively junior Commander commanding her under my flag, but even if the Admiralty consented to make him an acting

Captain, Carpenter would be junior to Captain Halahan, who was to command the naval assaulting force; so I told him that I was very sorry, but under the circumstances he could not command the *Vindictive*. He was, of course, very distressed, so eventually I rather weakly gave in, on the strict understanding, however, that the assaulting force of bluejackets and marines was in no way under his command. His job—akin to that of the sailing masters of old—would be, I told him, to lay the *Vindictive* alongside the Mole in the selected place, and keep her there until the assaulting force, which was an independent command, had completed its work and re-embarked. The *Daffodil* would be under his orders to push the *Vindictive* in until she was securely berthed.

There was never any question of Carpenter having any other responsibility of any sort in the conduct of the expedition, and this was clearly explained to him and Halahan, and understood by them both, before I definitely decided on a course which, I felt, was somewhat irregular.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PREPARATIONS AND TRAINING OF PERSONNEL

Choice of position for blockships and *Vindictive*; Fitting out of blockships and boarding ships; Description of Zeebrugge Mole; Arrangements for destruction of viaduct; Expedition delayed; Training and equipment of personnel; Camouflage; Concentration in the Swin.

WE were able to obtain detailed drawings of the Belgian ports from engineers, who had been connected with their construction and were refugees in France and England. These, with the assistance of aerial photographs, were of the greatest value in the preparation of the plans.

The selection of the right place for the Zeebrugge blockships caused me much concern, but I had the best expert opinion at my disposal. We knew all about the locks and the construction of the canal, the bottom of which was made of solid pavé blocks, with sloping sides (*see* plan) and could not be deepened below that level.

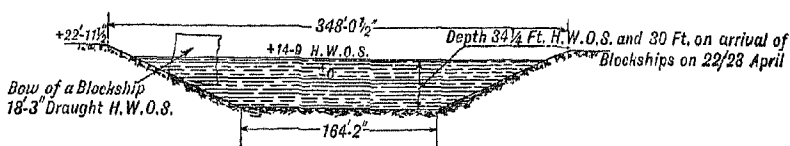
My first intention was to ram all the blockships into the lock, if it was open—as seemed likely at high water with a bombardment in progress—and to sink one ship on each sill. But the depth of water at low spring tides in the lock and its vicinity, where there was no silt, was 19 feet, with a rise and fall at spring tides of 14 feet and at neap tides of 11½ feet, it would therefore have been possible at low water, to cut away sufficient of the blockships, to allow a submarine or even a destroyer, to pass over at high water. Lying in such a narrow channel, it would also have been easy to build cofferdams to dry dock the blockships, and to rig shears over them to facilitate the work of removing the obstruction.

On the other hand, aerial photographs showed an immense accumulation of silt at the entrance of the canal, and the Belgians who had escaped from the Zeebrugge dredger, and were produced for Admiral Bacon to interview (*see* page 151), told us, that the depth at the entrance of the canal was so reduced, that even small submarines were unable to pass through

the channel at low tide. They declared that the trouble arising from silt at Zeebrugge was a very serious matter, owing to the lack of efficient dredgers.

As a result of our investigations, we came to the conclusion that the depth in the narrowest part of the canal, i.e. at the shore end of the "estacades" (wooden piers), could not exceed ten feet at low water ordinary spring tide, the mean level 17 feet, high water neaps  $21\frac{1}{2}$  feet, and high water springs 24 feet. The channel to block was 240 feet wide, hence if two blockships 300 feet long, could be sunk diagonally across the channel at the narrowest point, with their bows driven ashore on either bank, and their sterns swung round until they grounded (as shown in the aerial photograph I submitted to

SECTION OF CANAL ENTRANCE  
ZEEBRUGGE



the Admiralty on 24th February, *see* page 214), the channel would be effectively blocked, and no vessel drawing eight feet or more would be able to pass. Our Liverpool Salvage Company expert declared that the silt would add greatly to the difficulty of salvage, and that the raising of vessels, concreted as the blockships were, would not be practicable with the appliances at Zeebrugge, particularly if they were well holed below the water line. So this seemed to me the best possible method of blocking the channel; however I hated giving up my project of sinking a ship in the lock entrance if the gate was open, or of ramming the lock gate, and decided that the leading ship should still do so; a far easier task, once the canal was entered, than swinging the two ships into exactly the right positions across it; but as the latter promised, with the assistance of silt, to be the more permanent obstacle, I added that if only two ships arrived at the entrance, they were to concentrate on blocking the channel there.

We knew that the channel at Ostend was kept clear of silt, to a great extent, by scouring it out with pent up water,

released through sluices from the "Bassin de Chasse." The narrowest part of the channel, which also had a solid pavé and concrete bed, was 350 feet wide between the piers, the depth of water in the centre of the channel being 15 feet at low water and 30 feet at high water springs. If two ships drawing 22 feet could be sunk as shown in the plan submitted to the Admiralty, the harbour would be effectively blocked.

The fitting out of the five cruiser blockships was superintended by their captains. Each was provided with an additional conning and steering position, all control apparatus being duplicated. These positions were well protected with defensive mats, to keep out machine-gun and rifle fire. Protection was also given to machinery, boilers and steering connections, by concrete blocks placed in suitable positions. Charges were fitted for blowing out portions of the ships' bottoms, and firing keys for blowing the charges were placed in both conning positions. Smoke-making apparatus was fitted to enable the crews to cover their escape. Auxiliary machinery not required for the passage, and everything of value was removed, especially copper and brass, of which the enemy were known to be very short; and only sufficient coal was carried to steam the vessels to the Belgian coast and back. The masts were also removed to make the ships less conspicuous. The three foremost guns were retained to enable the ships to engage the shore batteries and defend themselves during the approach. Twenty rounds of ammunition for each gun were stowed in ready racks, handy to the gun.

After consultation with experts of the Liverpool Salvage Company, cement blocks and bags of cement were placed in the positions considered best to prevent or delay the removal of portions of the blockships, which would bar the passage of torpedo-craft and submarines at high water; and every other available space was filled with rubble and concrete, subject to the draught of the Zeebrugge blockships not exceeding 19 feet, and those for Ostend 22 feet, by the time they arrived at their destination.

As Commander Carpenter was fully occupied with Staff work at Dover, the fitting out of the *Vindictive* was superintended by Lieut.-Commander Rosoman and her engineer officer—Engineer Lieut.-Commander W. A. Bury; and

Concrete Filling shewn thus:-

### Protective Mattresses

At Boone Lake

## Air Escape Holes

**Explosive Charges** " " " " " "

### Weight of Concrete about 1500 Tons Double Bottom Flooded to give Greater Stability

[illegible]

Stokes Mortars shewn thus:- o  
Lewis Guns



Commander Seymour Osborne superintended the fitting of the *Vindictive's* special armament, with the help of the gunnery officer of the *Hindustan*—Lieut.-Commander F. G. Bramble—who joined the *Vindictive* for the operation.

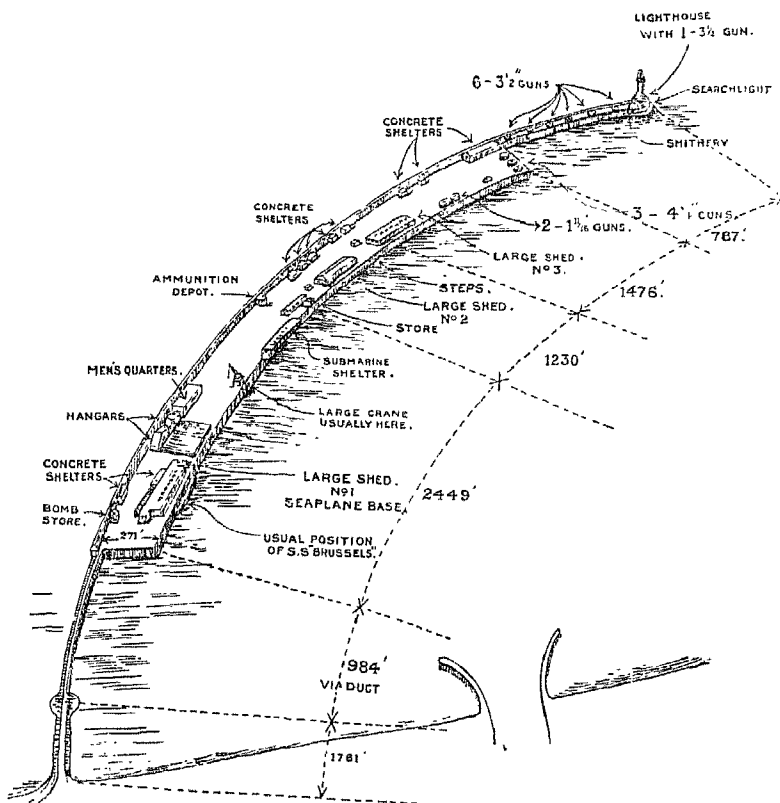
In order to launch the assault as nearly as possible from the level of the Mole parapet, a stout deck was built on the skid beams (on which the boats normally rested) from the forecastle to the quarter-deck on the port side, the boat crutches being removed; three wide ramps sloped up from the starboard side of the upper deck to the false deck, to give ready access to it, and enable the assaulting force to remain under cover as long as possible. Eighteen brows (gangways) were hinged on to the false deck, and triced up, ready to be dropped on the parapet of the Mole, which during the possible hours of attack would be from four to seven feet higher than the false deck.

An 11-inch howitzer was mounted on the quarter-deck, a 7.5-inch howitzer on the forecastle and another on the false deck, for engaging the batteries on the shore end of the Mole, and firing on the locks and seaplane base. Two large fixed "flammenwerfers" (flame throwers) were mounted in shelters, one abreast of the forebridge, the other at the after end of the upper deck; three pom-poms, ten Lewis guns, and 16 Stokes mortars were mounted along the port side. Three pom-poms and six Lewis guns were mounted in the foretop, to fire over the parapet at the German guns' crews, and cover the assault. The foremast above the top was removed. The mainmast after being removed was laid horizontally across the quarter-deck, the heel was imbedded in concrete, and the end extended several feet beyond the ship's side, to act as a bumpkin to protect the port propeller. Special fenders were fitted to the port side, to protect the ship's side from the under water projection of the Mole, and huge fenders were fitted to the port side of the forecastle, to take the first bump when she went alongside.

Although the *Iris* and *Daffodil* met all my requirements for the operation, they were designed for short bursts at full speed across the Mersey, and had proved to be poor steamers for a long voyage; it was therefore arranged for the *Vindictive* to tow them for the greater part of the passage. This reduced the speed of the passage to about 11 knots, which was a

disappointment, as I had hoped for a more rapid approach. They had a rather low freeboard, and it was necessary to provide scaling ladders to reach the parapet of the Mole.

The three storming ships were provided with large grappling irons, to secure them to the Mole; these were suspended from



Sketch Plan of Zeebrugge Mole.

Issued to Commanding Officers of Units prior to attack.

derricks, from which they could be lowered over the parapet. Apparatus was also fitted for making smoke-screens to cover their retreat.

The entrance of the Bruges canal is 880 yards to the eastward of the base of Zeebrugge Mole, which runs out from the shore in a north-north-easterly direction. For the first 280 yards a causeway carries a double railway line, connected with the

main European system, on to an open viaduct, through which the current races, up to a speed of six knots during spring tides. This viaduct is 300 yards long, 40 feet wide, and carries the double railway line and a roadway to the Mole proper. It is supported by six rows of 59 piers,  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet apart, cross tied in all directions, and strengthened by horizontal girders  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the top. On the western side of the roadway there is a steel palisade about 12 feet in height, to protect the traffic from the strong winds. At the top, this palisade carries a pathway, which communicates by a short flight of steps with a broader pathway, running the whole length of the outer Mole.

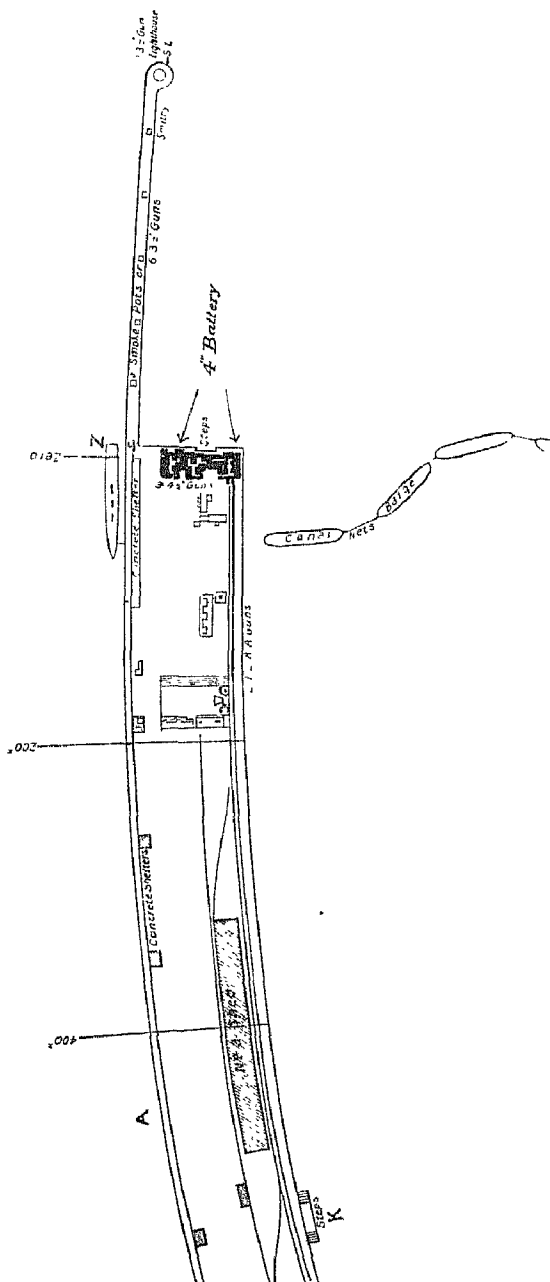
The outer Mole is a massive stone structure, extending in a curve for 1,840 yards and is 80 yards wide. The pathway referred to is 16 feet above the Mole, ten feet wide, and has a parapet three feet six inches high on its seaward side and stout galvanised iron rails on the inner side. Stone steps and iron rung ladders lead down on to the Mole at intervals. This pathway continues for 360 yards beyond the end of the Mole to the lighthouse, being increased in width on the extension to 15 feet.

Aerial photographs clearly showed six guns on this extension, and what appeared to be two or three guns at right angles to them across the end of the Mole\*; these guns were believed to be 4.7-inch and those on the extension three-inch.

In addition to the Railway Station and two large goods sheds, which were shown on the Belgian plan, the Germans had built four hangars and a number of sheds or living quarters for the garrison, and an overhanging submarine shelter.

Admiral Bacon had told us at the Conference on 18th December, that he intended to disembark the troops abreast of the western end of the outer shed, i.e. 360 yards from the nearest guns. I was determined to land the assault as near the guns as possible. Knowing what the Mole was like in

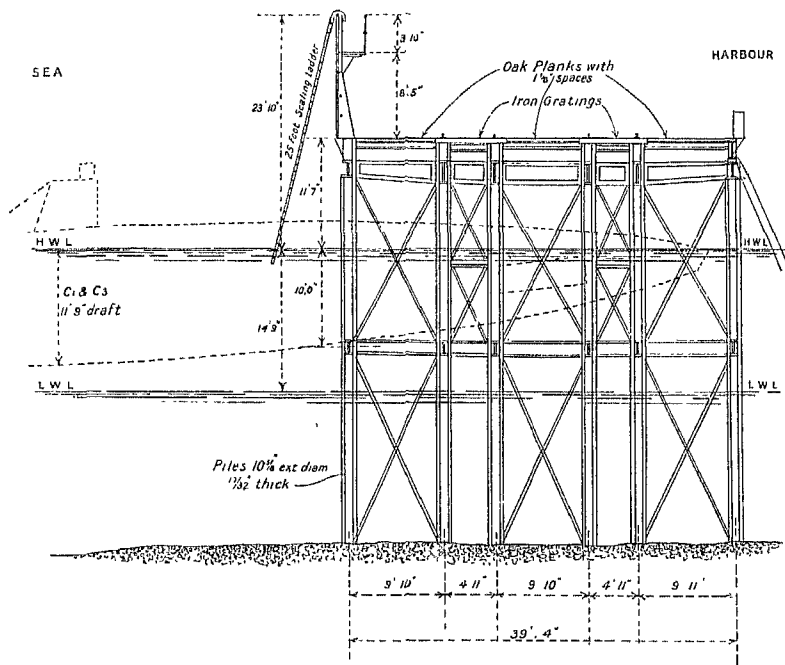
\* The latter did not exist. From information supplied by the German Admiralty, "there were on the Mole extension four 4.1-inch and two 3.5-inch naval guns. They were mounted close behind the bulwark at intervals of about 25 metres. They could fire through an arc of 360 degrees except in so far as they masked each other. Loading would be somewhat difficult when trained inside the harbour. When pointed outside the harbour, the bulwark prevented the guns from being depressed more than a few degrees—this would not allow them to be pointed at the water line of vessels close at hand. Ammunition was kept in readiness at the guns. A 6-inch Very cannon was mounted on the Mole."—"United States Naval Institute Proceedings," Vol. 55, March, 1929.



# Zeebrugge Mole.

Issued to the Commanding Officer of Units before the attacks.

1914, I was able to visualise the nature of the alterations and additions shown so clearly in the aerial photographs. A long building had been constructed at the end of the Mole, alongside the footpath, and its flat roof appeared to be level with it; and I decided that this was the most suitable spot for the disembarkation from the *Vindictive* to take place,\* for our men would thus be well placed to rush the enemy's guns' crews,



Cross Section of Viaduct looking towards the Mole.

who were in a very exposed position, especially on the narrow extension; and they would be spared a long and desperate advance against barbed wire and machine-gun fire, which I had good reason to dread and was fearfully anxious to avoid. The *Iris* would berth just ahead, and the *Daffodil*, after pushing the *Vindictive* into place, would lie alongside her to disembark her men. In these positions, none of the three boarding vessels could be hit by the shore batteries, as they would be protected from those to the westward by the curve of the Mole,

\* It was in fact the concrete roof of the garrison's living quarters.

and the guns on the extension could only fire at them for a few moments before they were alongside, when five out of the six guns would be masked.

If the assault succeeded in capturing these guns, it was hoped to advance down the Mole to the westward, and do as much damage as possible to the electric cranes, seaplane station, and any vessels that might be lying alongside the Mole, before withdrawing. The company of 50 bluejackets from the Grand Fleet were selected for the demolition work, under the command of Lieutenant C. Dickinson; and were to be covered by a guard of 20 marines; the arrangements for the demolition were planned by Sandford in the greatest detail, copies of the Belgian drawings were made, for instruction purposes, of every object we wished to destroy, and men were taught exactly how much explosive would be required for each object and where to place it; particular attention was drawn to the guns, the electric cranes and the floating crane and dredger, which were known to lie alongside the Mole at night. Sandford managed to obtain a number of wicker baskets on wheels from the G.P.O. for the transport of explosives, and his plan for demolition was a masterpiece of organisation.

As I have mentioned, I was anxious to cut the Mole off from possible reinforcements. It happened that I had sat on the parapet of the viaduct when I watched the 7th Division land in 1914,\* and had seen the current sluicing through the viaduct below me. This gave me the idea of towing rafts carrying high explosives, fitted with time fuses, and loosing them just to the westward of the viaduct, so that they might get entangled in the piers, and Welman carried out some experiments from C.M.B.s; this project had been embodied in the plan submitted to the Admiralty. However, in the meantime, the ubiquitous Sandford had thought of a much better scheme; we had a number of old submarines only fit for local defence, and he suggested that I should ask for two of them, put as much high explosive in the bows as they would carry, and ram them into the viaduct—one would be enough, but it was safer to have two in case one broke down. The Commodore of Submarines raised no difficulty and Admiral Wemyss approved, so I gave Sandford a free hand to make use of my authority and organise

\* See Vol. I, page 115.

the exploit. I can think of no one I have ever met who carried enterprising initiative further than that most gallant and gifted officer, and it was a long time before my office was free of correspondence connected with his activities.

First he went to Portsmouth and took over the two submarines, *C1* and *C3*. It was so important to have the right commanding officers, and finding a young married officer in command of *C3*, he managed to effect an exchange, which gave the command to his younger brother—Lieutenant R. D. Sandford—and he arranged for Lieutenant A. C. Newbold to command *C1*.

The elder Sandford then set to work to provide means for the escape of the submarine crews. In my name he commandeered a very fast motor-boat, which was being built on the Thames for the French Government, at a price, I think, of £14,000, but finding later that she was unsuitable for his purpose, he returned her. I did not hear the end of this for some months. Then hearing that a new picket-boat, which had been built at Chatham, was proceeding to Portsmouth under her own steam, he suggested seizing her as she passed Dover, and telegraphed in my name to the two Commanders-in-Chief, to say that I required her and proposed to borrow her for a fortnight or so. He then selected a crew of stalwarts for the picket-boat and told me he proposed to follow the submarines in her, and pick up the crews, after they had blown up the viaduct.

Sandford thought of every conceivable contingency, as the following extracts from the operation orders show.

“It has been decided for this purpose to use two ‘C’ Class submarines, each carrying as far forward in their bows as is immediately practicable five tons of Amatol.

The tonnage of a ‘C’ Class submarine is 330 tons, and if collision with the viaduct takes place at a speed of six knots or more, the tapered nose and hull will readily penetrate the comparatively light bracing of the piers, and the submarine be gradually brought up, riding on the horizontal girder, as shown in sketch. It is impossible in any event for the submarine to run through the viaduct without tearing the conning tower from the hull.

To enable the submarines to be abandoned if opportunity offers before collision takes place,  $C_1$  and  $C_3$  have been fitted with gyro control, which enables the submarine to steer itself when once set on the required course.

A motor dinghy is towed from a boom projecting from the side of the submarine before the conning tower, by which the submarine can be abandoned when finally aimed at its object. The dinghy can be towed at ten knots satisfactorily.

If the commanding officers of the submarines consider the circumstances, such as the presence of smoke and lack of visibility of the viaduct, render a collision with the viaduct by gyro control uncertain, then at their own discretion, as arranged by signal, the submarines may be driven into the viaduct with the crews still aboard, and endeavour made to abandon the submarines by one or other of the methods of escape proposed below. One of the time fuses, five, eight, or 12 minutes, is to be ignited, according to circumstances, at the discretion of the commanding officers of the submarines before abandoning."

Then followed technical details as to the firing of the five-ton charge of Amatol in the submarine.

"Every effort is to be made to strike the viaduct end on, on a course S. 85 E. so as to penetrate to the greatest possible extent. Speed being adjusted accordingly.

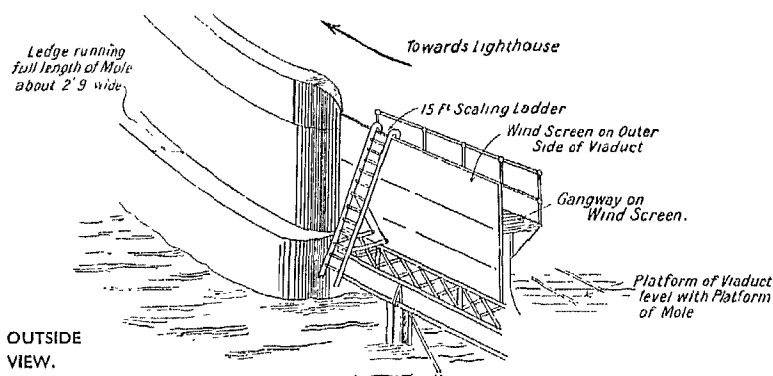
If the gyro control is not used, so that the submarines cannot be abandoned before striking the viaduct, then one or other of the following methods of escape before the explosion of the charge may be tried.

By dinghy and picket-boat, which will accompany the submarines, forming a smoke-screen as required, and this boat will 'stand by' the submarines. This boat will stem the current just clear of the submarine and will take off the crews in the dinghys as they come clear. The motor dinghys should swing to the current from the after boom, and point away from the pier unless the submarine swings round and crushes them against the



pier, which should not take place if the submarine penetrates the bracing. If required, the picket-boat will veer in a buoy and tow the bow of the dinghy off the viaduct. In the event of the dinghys being crushed, the picket-boat will endeavour to pick the crews off the submarines direct, but this will be a very difficult operation if the current is as strong as six knots. When the crews are on board, the picket-boat will clear at full speed before the explosion of the charge.

If all boats fail, it must be realised that the explosion of the charge would probably prove fatal to anyone floating in the water, and in the event of the boats failing, the



Connection between seaward end of Viaduct and shoreward end of Mole.  
Issued to Commanding Officers of C1 and C3 prior to attack.

crews of the submarine and picket-boat must get away on to the viaduct itself and not jump overboard. For this purpose 25 feet and 15 feet scaling ladders are provided. The 25 feet ladder will enable the pathway on the palisade to be reached, and the 15 feet ladder, which can be carried, will enable the crew to reach the two feet nine inches ledge on the outside of the stone Mole as shown (see sketch).

This ledge should lead right down the Mole to the *Vindictive* and being overhung by the stonework above, no one except our own landing party is likely to be there. The landing party should be warned of the possible arrival of the viaduct party along this route. It may be

advisable to take shelter under the curved wall of the Mole, if the explosion is imminent on arrival at the ledge."

The navigational details for finding the exact spot were worked out by Sandford with the Surveying Officers on my Staff.

I had an unpleasant shock at the end of February, when Captain Edwards reported that, judging by the amount of chlor-sulphonic acid which was accumulating at Dover, he did not think that there was the remotest chance of obtaining enough to make all the smoke I required by the middle of March. I summoned Brock and found that he, realising this, was working on another system, by means of which an equally effective smoke could be produced from stannic-chloride carried in cylinders.

For the next two nights we watched a trial of this system, and it certainly proved its efficiency for breaking up searchlight beams, but the question of weight debarred its use for an operation of the magnitude contemplated. For instance, the weight of the plant limited the M.L.s to an hour and a half effective smoke making, quite inadequate for an operation which might extend over daylight. In reporting this to the Admiralty on 4th March, I remarked that perhaps it was unfair to say, that the operation would have to be postponed entirely, owing to the failure of the smoke makers to produce sufficient for my requirements, but it could be definitely stated, that if we were ready to carry out the operations during the March period, it would not be possible to supply a sufficient quantity of smoke to justify embarking on it.

As a matter of fact, the completion of the ships had been so delayed by the late arrival of some of them, and the delay in getting the ferry steamers away from Liverpool, that the operation must necessarily be postponed, irrespective of smoke, until the April dark period. I urged the Admiralty to use every endeavour to provide me with another 63 tons of chlor-sulphonic acid by the 3rd April. The system which depended on it, was immeasurably superior for a night operation to any other which had been produced by Wing-Commander Brock, and I was dependent on him and the staff he had established at Dover. It was too late to experiment with other systems.

Chlor-sulphonic is one of the essentials for the production of saxin, which was being manufactured by a number of firms as a substitute for sugar. The Admiralty appealed to the War Cabinet, and so the manufacture of saxin was completely shut down, until all the chlor-sulphonic acid I required had arrived at Dover.

The value of Brock's contribution to the undertaking was simply incalculable, in addition to fitting out the vessels with smoke-making apparatus, he designed special smoke floats, to be anchored in selected positions; he also designed immense flame throwers for the *Vindictive*; parachute flares for aircraft to drop; flare rockets for surface vessels to fire, and special light buoys to mark the route. Brock's one plea, which I would have preferred to have refused—as his genius for inventions was so valuable—was that he should be allowed to take part in the attack. He told me he was particularly anxious to get on to the Mole, in order to try and find out the German method of sound ranging, so I reluctantly consented to his going in the *Vindictive*. Brock also suggested that he should provide a detachment for working the fixed and portable flame throwers, smoke apparatus, phosphorus grenades, etc., and for firing rockets from the *Vindictive* whilst alongside, to illuminate the entrance and show up the lighthouse on the end of the Mole as a guide to the blockships. This detachment was known as the "Pyrotechnic Party" and consisted of 34 men from the Admiralty Experimental Station at Stratford, and Brock told me, were all volunteers for a hazardous service. Lieutenant Graham Hewett, R.N.V.R., was to command them, and Lieut. A. L. Eastlake, R.E.—flame thrower expert—was attached to the party.

Meanwhile the training of the Marine Light Infantry battalion went on at Deal, that of the seamen at Chatham, and the Marine Artillerymen were given instruction in the working of howitzers and pom-poms at Shoeburyness. A lay out of Zeebrugge Mole was made on King's Down near Deal, the officers and men were told that it was a position in France which they would be called upon to attack, and attack it they did, vigorously by night and day. Both bluejackets and marines were given instruction in trench warfare and close fighting with bomb and bayonet, as well as Lewis gun and rifle; the former at the military training school at Chatham.

It was necessary to provide some sort of camouflage for all the activity at Dover, Chatham and Deal, and after I had consulted Admiral Wemyss, he wrote me the following letter on 4th March, marked *most secret*, copies of which I sent to the Commanders-in-Chief and other authorities with whom I was in communication, "inadvertently" omitting the usual precautions which should have been taken when forwarding such a letter.

"In view of the possibility of the enemy breaking through the line on the North Coast of France, and attacking Calais and Dunkirk, a special battalion of Marines and a company of bluejackets will be placed at your disposal for reinforcements, and to act as demolition parties, etc., to destroy guns and stores. You are to make every preparation for blocking Calais and Dunkirk harbours at the last possible moment, with the ships whose names have been given to you verbally, so as to deny the use of these ports to the enemy if necessary."

This story got about as a great secret, and the enemy's March offensive gave colour to it.

The King paid a visit to the Marine Depot at Deal and honoured the 4th Battalion by inspecting it on the 7th March, and Admiral Wemyss also inspected the battalion later.

Those weeks of preparation entailed visits to London, Chatham and Deal and trips to sea in various craft to try out new apparatus; they brought me into touch from day to day with all sorts of people, brimming over with enthusiasm, bent on devising new schemes for the confusion of the enemy. Elliot, who had seen much fighting in Serbia, and Halahan, who had been nearly three years in France, suggested that the raiders should be provided with loaded ash plants—no well-equipped raider, they declared, was complete without one; so Mr. Briggs provided 300 for the first flight of blue-jackets and marines. Brock supplied portable flame throwers, for helping to clear out the dug-outs and shelters, in fact the assaulting force was equipped with all the latest Army experience, both in method and material.

By the end of March everything was ready, 12 C.M.B.s and ten M.L.s had joined the Patrol from Portsmouth, 11 M.L.s

from the Nore, and a Leader and four destroyers had joined from Harwich. Commander Carpenter had completed the staff work in my office of co-ordinating the detailed orders, and took command of the *Vindictive* with the acting rank of Captain, and on the 3rd April the *Hindustan*, *Vindictive*, *Thetis*, *Iphigenia*, *Intrepid*, *Sirius* and *Brilliant* moved out into the Swin, where they were joined by the *Iris* and *Daffodil*.

On the 6th April, the 4th Battalion of Marines embarked in a transport at Dover "bound for France," but when well clear of the land, course was altered for the Mouse lightship at the entrance to the Thames, where they were transferred to the *Iris* and *Daffodil*, and from thence two companies to the *Hindustan* and one to the *Vindictive*. The *Hindustan* companies were to go to the *Iris* and *Vindictive* for the actual operation.

The bluejacket assaulting force was divided into four companies, each consisting of two officers and 50 men; two to be carried in the *Vindictive*, one each in the *Iris* and *Daffodil*.

In the Swin the ships were out of sight of land, the only correspondence allowed was by active service postcards, and the real object of the training was now explained to the officers and men. I went to the Swin in the destroyer *Phæbe* on the 7th April, and visited all the ships and spoke to the assembled ships' companies.

I did not look upon the risks that were being run by the boarding vessels, as being any greater than those every soldier or sailor was expected to face in modern war, and there was no question of asking for volunteers for any service other than that in the blockships and submarines, and the M.L.s which were to follow them in to save the crews. On board the blockships, I told the men that although they had already expressed their wish to take part in a hazardous enterprise, it had been impossible previously, owing to the necessity for secrecy, to ask them to volunteer for an undertaking which gave them little chance of anything better than a prison in Germany, though we would do all in our power to bring them away, after they had sunk their ships. If any of them were married, or had any reason for wishing to withdraw, they could do so, and no one would think any the worse of them. However no one showed any sign of anything but enthusiasm and they cheered vigorously.

Everything down to the smallest detail was now ready, and we only had to wait for the combination of all the essential conditions to occur, on one of the five possible days in April, which were the 9th to the 13th inclusive.

For the details of the plan of attack as finally decided upon, for the fitting out of the ships and the training and equipment of the personnel, I have to thank a number of splendid officers, to whom I am eternally grateful; their confident faith that our enterprise would be carried to a successful issue meant so much to me, and was an inspiration to all who came in contact with them.

## CHAPTER XX

### DISAPPOINTMENT

Co-operation of Naval Aircraft with Army in France; Dunkirk bombarded; The King crosses to France; Heavy transport of troops; Survey of "Z.O." route; C.M.B. activities; Wind and smoke-screens; Disclose plan to officers; Issue general order; Expedition sails; Returns owing to change of wind; Second attempt abandoned owing to rough sea; Admiralty's decision.

WHILE these preparations were in progress, the work of the Dover Patrol went on, apparently oblivious of what was in the wind. After the 21st March all our thoughts were with the Army fighting desperately, the air vibrated ceaselessly day after day with the thunder of the guns in France and Flanders, and it was hateful once again to be "laying off" powerless to help. The only thing I could do was to tell Commodore Lambe to send all the R.N.A.S. machines he could possibly spare, down the line to help the sorely pressed and less liberally equipped R.F.C.; and wait for the day when we could take a hand ourselves.

The enemy were evidently feeling pretty sore about the rough handling they had received off Dunkirk, and set to work to make Dunkirk town and harbour pay for it. Between the 23rd and 26th March, the 15-inch naval gun at Leugenboom dropped 53 shells into the town and harbour, at a range of over 26 miles. The R.M.A. siege guns retaliated by firing at Leugenboom and at the Naval Base at Ostend, but our aerial spotting was much interfered with by heavy smoke-screens. The enemy aircraft also bombed Dunkirk most nights, and ours dropped literally tons of bombs on Zeebrugge and Bruges Naval Base.

Meanwhile the deep minefield was being steadily reinforced by new lines of mines, and the patrol continued in a blaze of light. The dearth of victims was disappointing, but we know that the Heligoland Bight submarines gave up using the Straits in February and went north about, and that a little later, the

passage of the Straits was made optional for the Flanders submarines, and very few appear to have operated to the westward of the deep minefield.

On the 26th March, the Admiralty received information which pointed to a raid by German destroyers; the drifters were recalled from the patrol, but flares and searchlights were burnt as brilliantly as ever by the trawlers, P-boats and 30 knotters. Hoping that Heinecke (with whom I had a score to settle) was again on the warpath, I hoisted my flag in the *Attentive* and laid for him with four leaders and ten destroyers, stationed so as to ensure that even if he slipped by, he would be brought to action on his way back; however, nothing happened and the drifters returned to their patrol at daylight.

On 28th March, I accompanied the King to Calais in the *Kempenfelt*. I don't suppose that in the whole course of the War, or indeed in our long Military history, a British Army was in greater jeopardy than during those days in March, and His Majesty's visit at such a moment must have been heartening to his troops. On his return a few days later, he told me how much he was impressed by their indomitable spirit and bearing.

While the ships were lying in the Swin, waiting for orders to sail, those at Dover and Dunkirk had to go about their ordinary duties.

On the 29th March, reinforcements started to pour into France, and during the next seven days, 120,000 troops were carried across the Straits.

An enemy submarine escaped through the patrol on the 31st, and one or more submarines were very active to the westward of the Barrage during this anxious period, but were well hunted; some mines were laid off Boulogne but were swept up and we suffered no damage.

The route of the "Z.O." expedition had been most carefully surveyed by Douglas and Haselfoot, the positions of the existing Belgian Coast barrage buoys were exactly fixed, and permanent light buoys were laid in positions "A" and "B" (see plan, page 260), and preparations were made to lay Brock's Aga light buoys in certain positions, to facilitate navigation and enable the monitors to take up their bombarding positions accurately. The work of these two officers was of the greatest value, and the navigation of the Armada would be simply a matter for the guide of the



fleet to steam from buoy to buoy at a given speed, check the time at each buoy, and adjust the speed so as to be certain of reaching the last buoy at the correct programme moment; thence it would be a case of steering a dead reckoning course for the last 13 miles, with due regard to the strength of the cross tide, which had been carefully checked and noted by the Surveyors.

In order to accustom the enemy to our appearance off the Belgian Coast at night, monitor bombardments were carried out, air attacks were made and C.M.B.s were active off Zeebrugge and Ostend on every favourable night. The similarity of the timbre of a C.M.B.'s engine to that of an aeroplane was very noticeable, and it was hoped that this would add to the confusion and mislead the enemy.

It was also proposed to lay mines in the approaches to Zeebrugge and Ostend, that would sink after a specified time. It was hoped that if this was carried out two or three days before the main operation, the enemy would conclude that we were not going to send vessels into those waters; and we also hoped that they might withdraw their own patrol craft, owing to the mine danger. This minelaying was carried out by C.M.B.s very close to the enemy's ports.

It was of the greatest importance that the smoke makers should know the exact direction of the wind, and most elaborate arrangements were made to ascertain the direction of the wind on the Belgian Coast. The Admiralty were able to decipher the reports, made in code by wireless from the German Meteorological Station at Bruges, for the information of their submarines and patrols at sea. These reports were telephoned to me within a few minutes, or if I was at sea, they were sent by wireless in cipher. The Commodore at Dunkirk reported the direction and force of the wind on the Belgian Coast from time to time, and on the night of the operation, Commodore Boyle would be responsible for keeping me informed of the state of the wind at position "G".

A table had been prepared for each point of the compass for wind variations between W.N.W. and N.E. by E. inclusive, giving the position in which the smoke floats were to be anchored in each section of the smoke-making M.L.s; and similarly for the positions between which the C.M.B.s were to lay smoke-

screens. Special arrangements were made for a C.M.B. to lay a smoke float and maintain a screen off the entrance to Blankenberg harbour, which was the base of the German fast motor boats. The greatest credit is due to Brock and Carpenter for the way in which these details were worked out, and the clarity of the instructions. If the wind would only remain fairly constant between the limits given, I felt confident that the smoke-screening arrangements would enable us to close our objective without annihilation. I would not have undertaken the enterprise had I thought otherwise; it would have been sheer folly to have approached the most formidably fortified coast line in the world, equipped with numerous powerful searchlights and a system of brilliant illumination by star-shells, without the certainty of an effective smoke-screen.

The only Naval Hospital at Dover was Lord Tredegar's yacht *Liberty*, which only held about 40 beds.\*

I feared that the casualties might be heavy, and with painful memories of the inadequate preparations for the wounded at Gallipoli, I suggested to the Naval Staff that special arrangements should be made to receive the wounded. This was gone into most thoroughly by the Medical Director-General (Sir William Norman), and in addition to the Military hospitals at Dover, the R.M. Sick Quarters at Deal and the Naval Hospital at Chatham, being warned to prepare for a heavy influx "from France" (the situation there certainly warranted it), a special hospital train was kept in readiness to be moved to Dover, when the Admiralty received information that the attack was in progress.

Just before the April period was due, I summoned all the officers of the M.L.s, C.M.B.s and submarines on board the *Arrogant*, now commanded by Captain Ralph Collins—who was Commander of the *Colossus* and was now my Flag Captain. Captain Edwards had gone on the sick list, a substitute had to be found for him at short notice, and to his great delight, I selected Collins to lead the Zeebrugge M.L.s.

I then took all the officers into my confidence, told them the whole plan, enjoined the greatest secrecy, told them that they must carefully study their instructions, and those of the

\* See Vol. I, page 92.

adjacent units, as nothing which could be of any value to the enemy was to be taken into enemy waters, in case their vessels were sunk or stranded. I pointed out that although the instructions were rather lengthy and detailed, officers must be prepared to use their own initiative, and I emphasized the great importance of their doing so, as many of the units would be scattered and acting independently.

The M.L.s were manned by two R.N.V.R. officers and seven petty officers and men; the officers were drawn from every kind of profession and business, but were mostly pre-War yachtsmen, though some of them had had little experience of the sea before the War. The leader of the Ostend M.L.s—Hamilton Benn—was 55 and had a son fighting in France; he had been a keen yachtsman for many years, and I was interested to find that he had selected his own M.L. for one of the posts of honour in the forefront of the Ostend Operation.

Five M.L.s manned by volunteers were chosen to follow the five blockships, to endeavour to rescue the crews.

The C.M.B.s were commanded by young lieutenants, R.N. and R.N.R., mainly the former, and carried a second officer, most of whom were midshipmen R.N.R.; the smaller C.M.B.s carried one motor mechanic and the larger ones two.

The submarine crews were reduced to two officers and four petty officers and men.

The crews of the blockships were also reduced to the minimum for their final effort, but in order to lighten their work during the passage, 30 extra engine-room ratings were embarked in each ship, who were to be removed when the main force arrived at "D" buoy by five M.L.s, which were to transfer them to the minesweeper *Lingfield*. The sweepers were all under Captain Howard's command, and he begged me to allow him to take charge of this part of the operation, since I could not find a billet for him nearer the enemy.

My other veteran "dug out", Captain Bird, was of course also anxious to take a hand, but I had to ask him to be content with the charge of the deep minefield patrol, and before dawn to send all the drifters and trawlers on to the transport and trade routes, to patrol them during the absence of the destroyers. It is very satisfactory to be able to record that during the night

a submarine was destroyed in the deep minefield, which was later identified as *UB33*.

On the 7th April I issued the following general order :

“ To all Ranks and Ratings concerned.

Operation Z. O.

The object of the *Enterprise* we are about to undertake is the blocking of the Entrances of Zeebrugge and Ostend. These ports are the bases of a number of Torpedo Craft and Submarines, which are a constant and ever increasing menace to the communications of our Army and to the trade and food supply of our Country.

The complete achievement of our aims would have the most favourable and far reaching effect on the Naval situation.

I am very proud to command the Force which has the great privilege of carrying out this enterprise.

Drawn as this Force is from the Grand Fleet, the Harwich Force, the Dover Patrol, the Three Depots, and the Royal Marine Artillery and Light Infantry, it is thoroughly representative of our Service.

I am very confident that the great traditions of our forefathers will be worthily maintained, and that all ranks will strive to emulate the heroic deeds of our brothers of the Sister Service in France and Flanders.”

On the 9th and the 10th—the first two possible days of the April period, during which our enterprise could be carried out under the best conditions of tide and moon—the wind was southerly and variable. On 11th April the meteorological report was promising, and I issued the preparatory signal for the operation to commence.

This also went to Admiral Tyrwhitt at Harwich, as his force was to prevent interference from the northward, in case the enemy got wind of our intentions and sent reinforcements down from the Heligoland Bight.

The plan was worked out on an exact time-table for each of the five days of the period. On the 11th April, 4 p.m. was the hour for the force in the Swin to get under way and join

the vessels from Dover at "A" buoy, whence the whole force would leave under my flag at 7.30 p.m. and steam past "C", "D", "G" and "M" buoys at fixed times (*see* plan, page 260).

The time of arrival at "M" buoy, barring accidents, would be at 1 a.m. and this would be the "X" or zero hour, on which all the co-ordination of the whole plan depended. Arrangements were made to inform Commodore Lynes, the detached monitors, and Commodore Lambe, Fifth Group R.N.A.S. (since 1st April changed into Brigadier-General R.A.F.) if by any chance our arrival at "M" was postponed.

The engagement was to open with aerial bombardments by the 65th Wing (which included the Naval Handley-Page Squadron) 1½ hours before "X", and continue at intervals until "X" hour. The monitor bombardments were to commence ten minutes after "X" and go on at intervals until 55 minutes after "X". Prior to the *Vindictive's* arrival alongside the Mole (65 minutes after "X"), aircraft were to drop parachute flares.

During the forenoon of the 11th, Douglas left Dover to join the 15-inch monitors off Dunkirk, to accompany them to the bombarding positions, and Haselfoot went in a small monitor, accompanied by destroyers, to lay the special buoys after dark.

Commodore Boyle hoisted his broad pennant in the *Attentive* and accompanied by the flotilla leader *Scott* (Captain the Hon. W. Leveson Gower) and three destroyers from Harwich, sailed during the afternoon for "G" buoy to guard a gap in the Belgian Coast mined net barrage, which had been cleared to let the expedition through. He was to carefully note the direction and force of the wind and report it, by a screened flashing light, to the main force as it approached, through his destroyers—two of which had been left to watch "D" buoy and one "C" buoy. The flashing signal was to be made frequently, but under no circumstances was it to be answered, and no wireless signals were to be made.

I hoisted the silk Admiral's flag which the "Centurion's" had given to me—to be flown in action (*see* page 95) for the first time that afternoon, in the *Warwick*, my wife having converted it from a Rear-Admiral's to a Vice-Admiral's flag a few hours previously. It looked rather large on a destroyer's

small mast, as it was intended for a battleship, but at any rate it made my flagship easily recognisable.

The *Warwick* was a new destroyer commanded by Commander Victor Campbell (who had previously commanded the *Saracen* in the Dover Patrol). Tomkinson, Bedford, Morgan, Woolley and my coxswain Brady accompanied me. The latter had been with me in the *Fame* in the China War, and in every ship I had been in since.

Everything went according to plan, and at 7.30 the whole Armada of 74 vessels left "A" buoy in company, bound for the Belgian Coast.

As I wished to be free to leave the line, scout ahead, or move out to a flank with my small force of destroyers, I made the *Vindictive*, leading the centre column, the "Guide" of the Fleet, and thus confided the navigation of the Squadron to Carpenter, with instructions to make the alterations of course and speed, as necessary to comply with the time-table of the plan.

The main force was disposed in three columns (*see plan, page 264*). The boarding vessels, blockships and destroyers—except the *Warwick*—all towed something. The *Vindictive* towed the *Iris* and *Daffodil*, the latter a C.M.B., and all the other C.M.B.s were towed, as it was very important to conserve the endurance of the crew, their fuel, and the wear and tear of their engines, which, like an aeroplane's, only had a limited life between overhauls.

The M.L.s were disposed between the columns and proceeded under their own power. Sandford's picket-boat and the two submarines were towed by destroyers; the submarines were dependent upon their electric storage batteries for motive power, their petrol engines having been removed, and I wished to prolong their life as far as possible, in case they missed their objective and went astray.

Aeroplanes of the 61st Wing (late R.N.A.S.) and aircraft from Guston Aerodrome at Dover, covered the concentration and escorted the main force until night fell, to drive off enemy aircraft and give me good warning of the approach of enemy vessels.

Meanwhile the detached vessels, 60 in number, proceeded independently. The *Erebus* and *Terror*, their smoke-making M.L.s and three destroyers, were well on their way to their

bombarding station near the Dutch coast; and after dark the Ostend force, under Commodore Lynes, moved out from Dunkirk to meet the *Sirius* and *Brilliant* and carry out the Ostend operation in accordance with the plan.

The night was very dark and the sea smooth, the programme time for arrival at Zeebrugge—2.05 a.m. and departure 3.45 a.m.—gave a couple of hours to get away out of range before dawn broke, and everything depended on the direction of the wind.

My thoughts constantly turned to the assault on Santa Cruz in the Island of Teneriffe in July, 1797, when Nelson's impatient ardour impelled him to undertake a hazard, which was foredoomed by the state of the weather.

All went well for a time, such wind as there was, blew gently towards the Belgian coast, and I prayed that it would continue to do so—at any rate until we got to grips with the enemy—and that if it did not, that I would have the moral courage to break off the operation and wait for a more favourable opportunity.

On passing "C" buoy at 11 p.m.—the wind report of the destroyer there being favourable—I made a short prearranged wireless signal through her to the detached forces, that the programme would be adhered to.

On arrival at "D" buoy, the main force stopped to remove the surplus crews from the blockships. The wind had completely dropped, and while waiting, it became evident that it was shifting to the southward, as the clouds were moving slowly to the northward.

Tomkinson and Campbell both considered it likely that the wind on the surface, which was fitful and variable, might settle in a southerly quarter. Boyle reported light airs mainly from the south at "G" buoy. The conditions were otherwise ideal, they might not be better during the two days left to us, and then the moon and tide conditions would not recur until the 9th of May.

I went through a pretty difficult time during the next few moments. I knew that every man in the expedition felt, as I did, keyed up for the ordeal. How they would hate to be called off and then asked to undergo it all over again—or perhaps worse still, have to go back to their ships having achieved nothing; we might have been seen by an enemy submarine; we knew that the Swin force had been seen by neutrals, and

if the Admiralty thought for a moment that the expedition would no longer be a surprise, they would be absolutely certain to declare it off. What would our feelings be, if the weather proved favourable after turning back. These thoughts crowded through my mind and I was horribly tempted. It would be so much easier to go on and trust to the God of Battles and the good fortune of the British Navy for a happy issue. An Admiral afloat has one great advantage over his brother the General, who of necessity in modern war, must remain in safety at his headquarters many miles behind the line. At least I could share some of the risks I was asking others to undertake.

However, with a last thought of the shades of Nelson and Troubridge at Teneriffe, I made the fateful signal—one word on the wireless—which cancelled the proceedings for the night.

To turn 74 vessels, without navigation lights, 16 points on a pitch dark night was no easy matter, fortunately Carpenter, with a squadron navigator's foresight, had prepared detailed instructions for the conduct of the various units, should the signal be made, and these were embodied in my orders. Nevertheless it reflects great credit on the commanding officers, that they should have extricated their vessels from the difficult situation without more damage. The only victim was one of the C.M.B.s, which was cut down by one of its consorts and sunk, happily without loss of life. C.M.B.s simply cannot go slow, and we were lucky to escape so lightly.

The *Warwick* lay stopped to the southward of the main force, and I listened to the roar of the C.M.B.s and the noise of the M.L.s' engines, and anxiously watched to see if the signal was being obeyed. Of course it had to be passed by flashing light to the small craft, but from my position to the southward, I felt pretty certain that these signals could not be seen from the shore, which was 16 miles distant.

While lying there, we had a reminder of the power of the defences we had been about to challenge; a salvo of great shells came roaring from the shore and pitched about 200 yards from the *Warwick* with a tremendous splash—no doubt four from the 12-inch guns at Knocke, 32,000 yards away. We attributed the enemy's alertness to some form of sound ranging, and it was this that Brock was so anxious to investigate, when he begged me to allow him to land on the Mole.



I had issued the strictest orders that no confidential books, except a certain signal and W.T. book, were to be carried in the ships and destroyers, the small craft were only to carry the emergency signals for the night, and the individual orders relating to their units. Everything of a confidential nature was to be destroyed, the signal books by fire in the stokeholds, before entering enemy waters. As we were about to pass "G", Woolley, who had been charged with the duty of destroying the *Warwick's* signal books and my secret cypher, had already burnt them when the cancelling signal was made. Not that it mattered much at that stage, we knew that the enemy's system of fixing the position of a wireless signal by directionals was exact, and I had imposed wireless silence on all vessels near the enemy's coast. Signals from British waters were not to be answered. The one word I had made might well have passed as a signal from a patrol vessel. I have often wondered whether the wireless signal, sound ranging, or the flashing signals, were responsible for Knocke's outburst. The next few hours were a hideous anxiety.

The aerial bombardment of the 65th Wing had started precisely, according to the plan, and was in full blast. We could clearly see the searchlights turned upwards and the "flaming onions" soaring skywards, and could hear the booming of the enemy's anti-aircraft guns and our bombs exploding. When the monitor bombardments were due to start, the *Erebus* and *Terror* remained silent, but we heard heavy firing off Ostend. I wondered how the Ostend Force would fare, and whether the signal would get through to the detached small craft in time, and the thought of a score of possible incidents, which might give our intentions away, tormented me.

When I had satisfied myself that none of our craft were to the southward of me, I made for the Swin with all dispatch. I had one comforting thought, for by daylight it was blowing fresh from the southward, and I  *knew*  that by cancelling the operation, after passing through the nets and getting within striking distance of my objective, a disaster had been averted, although I don't suppose the people in the Swin thought so, for it was peaceful and sheltered enough when they arrived there.

When I arrived I visited each ship as before. It was not a pleasant atmosphere, I was feeling very unhappy, so obviously

was everyone else, and I felt that they were looking sideways at me, and wondering if I really meant business. I told them that if we had gone on, our great enterprise could only have ended in disaster; 120 odd vessels could not go within close range of the enemy's formidable batteries, and escape annihilation during the approach, without an efficient smoke-screen, which was impossible after the wind shifted. We were going to have a great success, not a heroic disaster, and I swore before Heaven that I would take them alongside the enemy, but they must trust me and wait until I considered that we could undertake the business with a fair prospect of success. Their shout of approval and ringing cheers lifted the awful cloud of depression, and I think we all felt happier, at any rate I know I did.

On my return to Dover I talked to Commodore Lynes on the telephone, and learnt that he had not stopped the monitor bombardment, which was carried out from fixed positions to the northward and westward of Nieuport, smoke-screened by M.L.s, in accordance with the plan. The destroyers and small craft withdrew without exposing themselves unduly, and had all returned with the exception of *CMB33*, which was missing. Lynes could offer no explanation for her disappearance.

Lambe reported that the 65th Wing had carried out their part of the programme with great gallantry, but much to my regret, I learnt that two Handley-Page machines had failed to return.

On the 13th, the last day of the period, the wind was between the possible limits, and I again made the preparatory signal. Douglas and Haselfoot went off to re-lay the buoys, which had been picked up before dawn on the 12th, and the vessels all raised steam. However, before long the wind began to rise, and I was afraid the sea would be too rough for the small craft to operate, and for the boarding vessels to berth on the weather side of the Mole. Loath to give up this last chance, I ordered the Swin force to get under way, in the forlorn hope that the wind might lessen, but instead it increased rapidly and two hours later I had to cancel the operation for that period, and stop the special buoys being laid.

Although we could do nothing on the Belgian coast, I thought it would be as well to carry out the bombardment in the Ostend area, when nothing else was taking place, to cover the tracks

of the abortive effort of the night of 11th-12th, in case the enemy suspected that something unusual had been taking place that night. At Zeebrugge nothing unusual had happened, as air raids were frequent, and no vessel had gone within 16 miles, except the *Erebus* and *Terror*, who were out of sight and did not open fire, although they had done so on other occasions. Marks were laid off Nieuport for a bombardment, in co-operation with the R.M.A. guns on shore, to take place at 2 a.m. However, the monitor part of the programme, which had to be smoke-screened—as the vessels were well within range of the 11-inch guns of Tirpitz battery—had to be abandoned on account of the weather being too rough for the M.L.s.

There was nothing to be done now, except hope for the best and wait patiently for the next period; but the thought of what the Admiralty might decide to do was a nightmare.

I was not left long in ignorance. The following day Admiral Wemyss arrived at Dover. He commenced by commiserating with me on my bad luck, and commending me for my prudence, and then told me that the Board had decided that the expedition must be cancelled, the ships were to be paid off, the 4th Battalion of the Royal Marines was to be disbanded, and the Grand Fleet people were to be sent back to their ships. He said the expedition could no longer be a surprise, as our force had been passed by a score of ships, including neutrals, and news of it would be certain to reach Germany, during the three weeks which must elapse before I could renew my attack; further, that it would be out of the question to keep several hundred men cooped up in the ships in the Swin for so long.

I had been doing some pretty hard thinking during the last few hours, and jerked out: "Why wait three weeks, I want to try again in nine or ten days." He said: "Why it will be full moon and you always stipulated that you must have a dark night with no moon, as well as high tide about midnight." I said: "No, I always wanted a full moon, but could not wait for it. Please go back and tell the Board that you approve of my carrying out the attack in the next period, when high tide occurs about midnight." He looked at me with a friendly grin and said: "Roger, what a damned liar you are!" but he promised to do what I suggested and see me through with it.

## CHAPTER XXI

### SUSPENSE

Secrecy Precautions ; Revised Instructions ; A General Order ; Vacancies filled ; Bombardments ; Submarines in minefield ; Decide to start on St. George's Eve.

THE week that followed our last attempt was one of the most trying I have ever spent in my life, and it passed fearfully slowly, despite all that had to be done in the interval. Now that so many people in the Dover Patrol knew the object of our expedition, it was necessary to impose strict censorship on all letters that went out of Dover, and all officers and men were cautioned to be very reticent when on shore.

When Admiral Wemyss consented to allow another attempt, I asked for a second battleship to be sent into the Swin to give more accommodation, as the ships were uncomfortably crowded. This he had seen for himself, for he and Sir Eric Geddes had paid a secret visit to the Swin, via Harwich, in one of Tyrwhitt's destroyers. The *Dominion*—a sister ship of the *Hindustan*—was sent to the Swin within a few hours of my request. I had good reason to be grateful to the Naval Staff for the help they so readily gave me in those difficult days.

The experience we gained on the night of the 11th-12th April, suggested some alterations in the arrangements, orders and time-table. On Boyle's suggestion, the gap in the mined net barrage was widened, and the ends of the gap were to be marked with a red and a white flashing Aga buoy respectively. "G" buoy was to be placed in the same position and would be in the middle of the gap, but "M" buoy was to be eliminated, and the time of passing "G" buoy was to be the "X" hour instead. The time-table was amended accordingly, and the aerial attack, which had been too prolonged on 11th-12th, was to commence one hour before "X," instead of one and a half hours. A day was added at either end of the period ; on the first day it was hoped the visibility would be low, as an early start would be necessary and consequently we would be rather a long time under way in daylight, with the risk of being sighted.

On the last day, the time alongside the Mole would be curtailed to 40 minutes, as I was determined to get well away before daylight. Had two extra days been similarly included in the last phase, it would not have affected the issue, as the wind did not serve on either day.

I was determined to carry out the blocking part of the operation, if it could be done with any prospect of success, and so provision was made in the revised orders to substitute P-boats and destroyers for the smoke-making M.L.s and C.M.B.s, if the sea became too rough during the passage across for them to operate. On receipt of a prearranged signal, all M.L.s and C.M.B.s were to be sent back; the only M.L.s to remain would be those manned by volunteers, which were to follow the blockships in to save their crews. Four P-boats were consequently fitted for making smoke and kept standing by, ready to join the force if required. I quite realised that if conditions were such that the small craft would have to be sent back, a landing on the weather side of the Mole would probably be impracticable, and that part of the operation would also have to be cancelled, though I did not discourage the gallant people in the boarding vessels by mentioning it.

It would also have been a question of sending the blockships on to a lee shore, with no chance of escape for the crews, or abandoning the enterprise, probably for ever. However, fortunately I was spared having to make any such decision.

The submarines had both lost their dinghys during the passage on the 11th; I need hardly say that they had every intention of fulfilling their mission in spite of this, though the most optimistic could not have expected to survive. Arrangements were then made for each submarine to carry two dinghys, one either side, slung to a spar, secured across the conning tower as high as possible above the sea level. Each dinghy was fitted with a small outboard motor and special pumps.

On 19th April, with the revised instructions, I issued the following general order:

“To all Ranks concerned.

Operation ‘Z. O.’

It is extremely important that this Operation should be carried out within the period mentioned in my

Memorandum of this date, with the possible addition of one further day if the necessity arises.

The enemy's defences, however, are such that the Blockships can only hope to reach their objective under cover of smoke. I wish it to be understood, therefore, that I have no intention of carrying out the Operation in the face of contrary winds, or under weather conditions in which smoke-screens cannot be produced.

If the wind should die away, or shift to a southerly direction, after the Force is committed to an attack, I know I can rely with great confidence on the smoke-producing craft doing their utmost to screen the blockships, submarines and boarding vessels from the searchlights and shore batteries.

In such an event it will be necessary to make smoke very close inshore, and the success of the Operation will depend on the resource and initiative of the small craft concerned.

ROGER KEYES."

During the waiting period in the Swin, Franks, who had commanded the *Iphigenia* in the two abortive attempts, and whose enthusiastic keenness had so greatly impressed me, became very ill with a severe attack of appendicitis. He was taken to Chatham Hospital in great pain, but before going on the operating table, he scribbled a note begging me to give the command of the *Iphigenia* to "Billy Leake," adding that he knew I would not regret it. The crew all signed a petition to the same effect.

Billyard Leake was only 22 and a Lieutenant of a year's standing; however, I gave him the command, and was thus able to give the vacancy to a young Sub-Lieutenant in the *Dominion*—M. Lloyd—who had begged for a place in one of the blockships after I had completed all the appointments. Another young officer in the *Dominion*, Sub-Lieutenant A. V. Knight, R.N.R., was fortunate enough to go to the *Sirius*, in the place of Croft-Cohen, who was accidentally gassed on the eve of sailing. The *Hindustan* and *Dominion* filled 22 vacancies which were due to sickness and other causes and lent four cooks and officers' stewards, who begged to be allowed to go in the *Vindictive*.

Meanwhile there had been a good deal of activity on the Belgian Front; German batteries shelled Dunkirk and everything they could reach, and our siege guns retaliated. At midnight on the 19th April, drifters on the minefield heard two heavy explosions, and proceeding to the spot, found large quantities of oil and bubbles coming to the surface; this continued throughout the 20th. Diving was impossible for some time, and the submarine was not identified, but it seems likely that it was *UC79*, which according to German records disappeared about this date.\*

On the 21st April one of Professor Bragg's indicator loops was laid across the Straits from the North Foreland to the Sandettie Bank. It was hoped to get warning when strange vessels passed over it.

At 4 a.m. on 22nd April, *UB55* was destroyed in the minefield and two officers and four men were picked up, a miraculous escape for them.

The 22nd April was the first possible day of the new period, and the meteorological report was not too bad, but it might well have been better; the weather was not too settled, the visibility was extreme, and it was by no means certain that the northerly wind could be relied upon to hold. We had six more days in hand, and the first had all the disadvantages I have mentioned before. I was naturally most anxious to avoid another false start; on the other hand the whole week might pass without a suitable day. Admiral Bacon had had to wait many weeks in order to carry out a simple long-range bombardment, very annoying, but not vital. If we failed to bring our enterprise off within the next seven days, one thing was absolutely certain: the Admiralty would call it off, and it simply was not fair to expect Admiral Wemyss again to take the responsibility of seeing me through, with the weight of Admiralty opinion against him.

So once again I had to make a fateful decision, the responsibility for which I could not share with anyone—even if I had wanted to!

This time I decided to go, and made the preparatory signal, and later the executive one, which put the whole enterprise in motion once more.

\* *UC79* is shown in the German record as lost in the "North Sea," but although they generally record losses which occurred in the Dover deep minefield as lost in the "English Channel," at least one submarine actually identified in the Dover minefield is shown as lost in the "North Sea."

I think it came as a surprise to everyone, and some of my Staff were doubtful of my wisdom, but I had a feeling that our hour had come. I did not include the P-boats\* on this occasion, as I had no intention of resorting to anything desperate so early in the period.

My wife walked down to the pier with me to see me off, apparently quite unperturbed. She alone knew what a hell of a time I had been going through and her last words were, that the next day was St. George's Day (which I had not realised), and that it was sure to be the best day for our enterprise, as St. George would bring good fortune to England, and she begged me to use "St. George for England" as our battle-cry.

After I had left she found my coxswain in great distress, having been left behind. She always looked upon him as my bodyguard and had put him in charge of our Gieve waistcoats,† with instructions to produce them if necessary; so she hastily motored him down to the C.M.B. base, just in time to catch one of the last boats to leave. Much to my amusement and that of my Staff, half an hour or so later, the C.M.B. came roaring up alongside the *Warwick* and my faithful Brady stepped on board.

\* The C.M.B.s shown in tow of P-boats in Plan, page 264, were towed by M.L.s.

† Life-saving waistcoats.



## CHAPTER XXII

### "Z. O." ATTACK ON THE MOLE

Expedition sails; A general signal; Blockships disembark surplus crews; Smoke-makers and destroyers advance; *Vindictive* arrives off Mole; *Daffodil* pushes her alongside; Assaulting force lands; *Iris's* difficulties; C<sub>3</sub> blows up viaduct; Picket-boat saves crew; Blockships seen entering Canal; Boarding ships retire; *North Star* sunk; *Phæbe* saves crew; *Warwick* picks up blockship survivors.

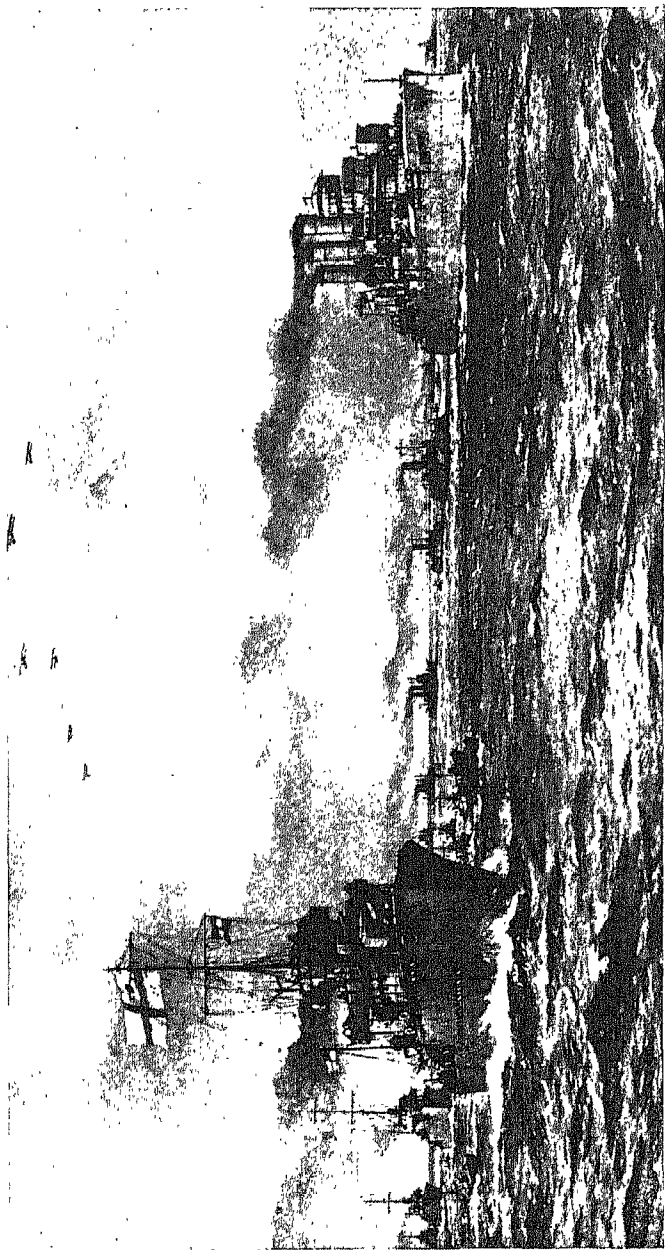
IN accordance with the time-table for the 22nd-23rd April, the Swin Force got under way at 1 p.m. and joined the vessels from Dover at "A" buoy, in time for the whole force to form up punctually in their cruising order by 5 p.m., when the expedition set out once again for the Belgian coast.

The force immediately under my flag that night consisted of 76 vessels organised in 26 units, each distinguished by a letter (*see* Plan, page 264, and key, page 296) and each of which had definite instructions for its conduct.

On the previous occasions the *Warwick* took up a position well ahead of the *Vindictive*; this time she took station ahead of the starboard wing column, which was led by the *Phæbe*, as I wished to keep the boarding ship and blockship column under observation.

Before night fell, remembering my wife's last words, I made a general signal by semaphore, "St. George for England," and Carpenter signalled back: "May we give the dragon's tail a damned good twist," which was very apt and to the point, but did not fit in with my mood at the moment.

After the twilight had faded, the full moon made it almost as bright as day—at least so it seemed to me, for I was very alive to the risks I had added by attempting the enterprise with a full moon, and the visibility appeared to be at least eight to ten miles. When I remarked on this, Tomkinson said drily: "Well, even if the enemy expect us, they will never think we are such damned fools as to try and do it in bright moonlight."



*[From a water-colour drawing by Bernard Gribble*

ST. GEORGE'S EVE, 1918  
Expedition on its way to Zeebrugge



Soon after this it became misty ; later it commenced to drizzle and the visibility was reduced to less than a mile.

On arriving at “D” buoy, the whole force stopped to enable the surplus steaming parties in the blockships to be disembarked ; some of them could not be found ; in fact several men stowed away in the *Iphigenia*, determined not to be deprived of the honour of taking part in the expedition. An admirable spirit, but it added to the difficulties of the rescue work. The *Intrepid*'s M.L. broke down and failed to go alongside, with the result that she carried a crew of 84 instead of 54 as intended.

All the C.M.B.s having been slipped, we got under way again, with the *Iris*, *Daffodil* and submarines still in tow, in time to pass “G” buoy at 10.30 p.m., precisely the programme time. Commodore Boyle had kept me well informed—through his destroyers—as to the state of the wind, which was still satisfactory when we passed the *Attentive* ; a misty rain was blowing lightly but steadily from the north-east.

The *Brilliant*, *Sirius*, two destroyers and two C.M.B.s then parted company, bound for Ostend, while we continued on our way to Zeebrugge.

There was no sign of the air attack, which should have commenced an hour earlier, and we concluded that it had been held up by the rain.

After passing “G” buoy, the *Warwick*, followed by the *Phæbe* and *North Star* (L Unit), the *Whirlwind* and *Myngs* (F Unit) on her port beam, drew out a mile ahead of the main force to drive off any enemy vessels that might be out on patrol. L Unit was charged with the duty of protecting the boarding ships, and the approach of the blockships, from possible destroyer attacks, and I decided to remain with them, because it seemed almost incredible that the enemy's destroyers—several of whom were known normally to lie alongside the Mole—would not come out to seek action and at least attempt to torpedo the *Vindictive* after she arrived alongside ; this was the only way she could be attacked, since all her vitals would then be protected from gunfire by the Mole, if she berthed anywhere near her proper position.

The bombardment by the *Erebus* and *Terror* should have commenced at 40 minutes after “X,” but was also delayed ; we learnt later that it was on account of the low visibility, but

Fortunately they were able to pick up the Oost gas light and whistle buoy marking the limit of the Dutch territorial waters, which Douglas knew to be accurately charted, and they commenced firing 15 minutes later than the programme time. Captain Wills of the *Erebus*, who was in command of that unit, had orders to continue the bombardment at intervals throughout the operation, until ordered by wireless to cease fire; but in any case he was to get out of range of Knocke Battery by daylight.

Three C.M.B.s (Units A and B) went ahead at full speed at 40 minutes after "X" to lay smoke-waves across our front, behind which the whole force was to advance. Another C.M.B. (Unit C) also went off ten minutes later to lay a smoke-float off Blankenberghe and renew it every 20 minutes. This she did very effectively, but owing to engine trouble was a little behind her time-table; anyhow, no enemy fast motor-boats appear to have emerged.

At 11.30 the *Warnick* passed an occulting light buoy, five miles N. 30° W. from Zeebrugge Mole, the correct charted position of the Blankenberghe buoy. In the meantime the other C.M.B.s were overtaking us, and the M.L.s closing up, to carry out their appointed tasks in compliance with their special instructions.

Fifty minutes after passing "X," one C.M.B. (Unit D) proceeded towards the Mole at high speed to lay smoke-floats in the western section, for screening in a north-easterly wind. She was then to patrol this line, making smoke, until relieved by eight M.L.s (Unit G).

Another C.M.B. (Unit E) proceeded at the same time to lay smoke-floats and patrol the eastern section until relieved by eight M.L.s (Unit I).

Two C.M.B.s (Unit H) proceeded at full speed, to fire their torpedoes at the enemy destroyers secured to the inner side of the Mole, and then run to the eastward making smoke, about a mile from the shore, to blank off the heavy batteries to the eastward of the canal entrance.

Two C.M.B.s (Unit V), 70 minutes after "X," proceeded at full speed direct for the end of the Mole, to lay their smoke-floats under the seaward side of the lighthouse extension, within 50 yards of the Mole if possible; the object being to mask the

guns on the lighthouse extension, during the near approach of the boarding vessels. These floats had their baffle plates removed, so that the flame emanating from them would indicate the approximate position of the Mole end.

At the same time, the *Whirlwind* and *Myngs* altered course to port to patrol the eastern area; the *Warwick*, *Phabe* and *North Star* stood on for a few minutes towards the Mole, and then reduced speed and hauled a little to starboard, to allow the boarding vessels to overtake them.

The smoke-screens appeared to be excellent, and they were entirely responsible for enabling the whole force to close unseen. It was not until about 11.50 p.m.—about ten minutes before the *Vindictive* was due alongside the Mole—that the enemy appear to have heard the C.M.B.s, and then the star-shells burst in the sky, making it as light as day, some well to seaward of us; one actually fell on the deck of the *Myngs*, three miles from the Mole. As they descended the lights were blanked out by the pall of smoke, which at that time rose to a good height above the sea level. Shortly after this, just before midnight, the enemy appeared to be thoroughly alarmed and with a roar like express trains, great shells passed over our heads, and a heavy barrage from the coast batteries was put down two or three miles outside us. It was an intense relief to me to know, that the battle was now joined and there could be no more turning back.

I had been deploring the absence of our aircraft's flare parachutes, but the enemy's star-shells provided all the illumination we required throughout the action.

The *Warwick* must have passed very close to the end of the Mole, but we were hidden in the smoke. The *Vindictive* was not so fortunate. She was steered from the conning tower, in which Lieut.-Commander Rosoman was stationed. Captain Carpenter was conning the ship from the port flammenwerfer hut, which had been specially protected against machine-gun bullets and splinters, and which gave an excellent view from the starboard bow to nearly right astern. Carpenter states that:

"At 11.56 the *Vindictive* emerged from the smoke and the lighthouse extension of the Mole was seen to loom out of the semi-darkness, about 300 yards distant on the port bow. Speed was immediately increased to full speed

and course altered to S. 53. W. magnetic, which, allowing for a cross-tide of two and a half knots, was estimated to make good the closing course of 45° to the Mole. Fire was not opened by the *Vindictive* until the batteries on the Mole commenced to engage her. This with holding of fire had been purposely arranged so that no act on the part of the *Vindictive* should assist in her discovery.

Very unfortunately, most of the smoke-floats off the lighthouse extension had been sunk by enemy gunfire; the remainder were no use owing to the shift of wind. The enemy opened fire almost at once."

Commander Osborne, who was directing the *Vindictive's* fire from the foretop, states that the first enemy shell hit the *Vindictive* when she was about 200 yards off, and he at once gave the order to reply, and the six-inch guns in the port battery, the pom-poms and Lewis guns in the foretop and along the port side opened fire immediately.

At one minute past midnight the ship bumped the Mole, taking the blow on the two specially prepared fenders, and the starboard anchor was let go.

It was very unfortunate that during the brief moments that the *Vindictive* was within the arc of fire of the Mole battery, that the smoke should have failed, as her upper works and personnel suffered heavily. Colonel Elliot, Major Cordner (Second in Command of 4th Battalion) and Captain Halahan were killed—as in their ardour to lead, they were all in exposed positions.

The loss of those resolute leaders was nothing short of a tragedy and their loss was much felt in the difficult hour which followed.

The increase to full speed was also very unfortunate, as it carried the *Vindictive* far beyond the position I was so anxious for her to take up; she eventually brought up 340 yards beyond it, out of reach of her primary objective—the guns which commanded the approach of the blockships—and she was exposed to the direct fire of the shore batteries to the westward of the Mole, which did much damage to the ship while she was lying alongside.

Carpenter reports :

“ This error in position was entirely mine, and was due to the great difficulty in recognising objects on the Mole amid the shell and smoke flare, the various objects having a very different appearance from that expected after studying aerial photographs.”\*

The *Vindictive* went through a very trying time before she was berthed ; the Mole anchors failed to grapple the parapet, owing to the derricks being too short, and it was not until the *Daffodil* arrived, three minutes later, and pushed the *Vindictive* bodily against the Mole, that the brows could be dropped on the parapet and the disembarkation started. Unfortunately only two of these could be used at first—though two more were brought into use later—the others having suffered from the Mole end shell-fire, and from crashing against the Mole before the ship was berthed.

A vessel drawing 19 feet, proceeding at high speed in shoal water, of course, carries a considerable surge with her, and for some minutes there was a good deal of movement caused by this and the back-wash when the *Vindictive* first went alongside ; and it was not an easy matter for men carrying machine-guns, ammunition and portable flame-throwers, etc., to get along the brows, which were sawing considerably on the Mole parapet.

The fixed flame-throwers were intended to keep the enemy at a distance, while the *Vindictive* was being berthed and the disembarkation was taking place. Brock, who had taken charge of the after flame-thrower, was very confident of being able to drive off the men manning the guns on the Mole, until a sufficient force had landed to rush them. Both flame-throwers, however, were put out of action by the oil-pipe connections being cut by gunfire during the approach, but in any case they would have been of no use in the *Vindictive's* position, as no enemy came within their reach.

The command of the bluejacket assaulting force devolved upon Lieut.-Commander B. Adams, commanding “A” Company ; Halahan's second-in-command—Lieut.-Commander Harrison—having been knocked unconscious with a broken jaw before

\* Captain Carpenter's report of *Vindictive's* proceedings, 24th April, 1918.

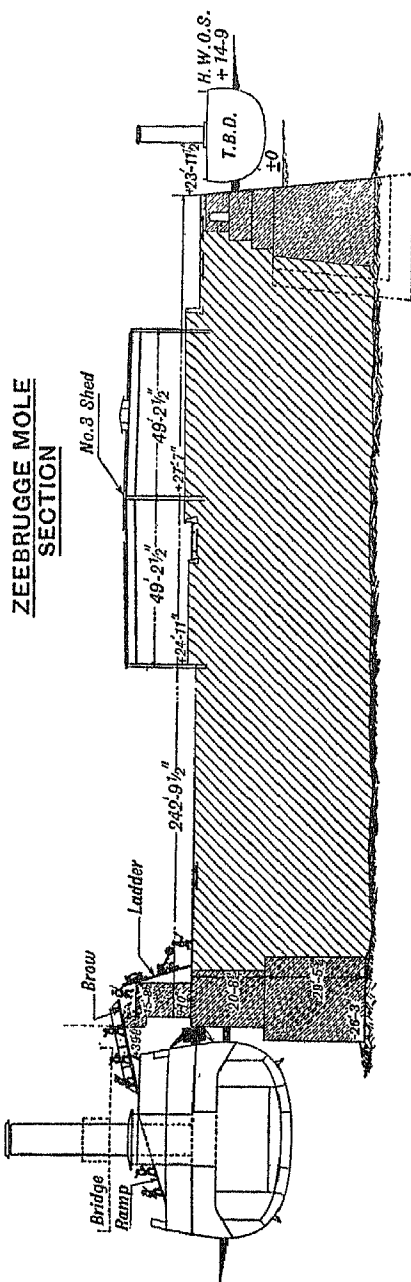


the *Vindictive* reached the Mole. Adams, followed by his men, was the first to land, and he reported that no enemy was in sight on the Mole. After fruitless efforts to help Rosoman place the Mole anchor in position over the parapet, he led the bluejackets along the footpath in the direction of the guns, and found a concrete look-out station about 40 yards to the eastward of the *Vindictive's* stern, with "what looked like a range-finder mounted behind it but higher up." This (according to German accounts) was the control station of the Friedrichsort battery (Goeben on our plan) of four naval eight-inch guns. Nearly half of Adams' company were casualties in the *Vindictive*, and he had not many people with him, but Brock and one of his party were among them, and he told Adams that he intended to go inside the look-out station and find out how the range-finder worked, evidently thinking that this was what he was looking for. A bomb was thrown in and the place was found to be deserted. Brock went in, and Adams never saw him again.

There was an iron ladder abreast of the control station, from the pathway to the Mole, and Adams sent a few men down it to attack some Germans, who were endeavouring to run from the shelters abreast of the pathway to the shore side of the Mole. While under cover of the control station, Adams took stock of the situation. He reported that: "The whole Mole was lighted by German star-shells and was well lighted all the time, our rockets fired from aft towards the three-gun battery assisting." He noted that two destroyers, lying alongside the Mole abreast of the *Vindictive*, were inactive; on the other hand the enemy seemed to be firing at the *Vindictive* from the shoreward end of the Mole. He said he could see clearly the three guns on the Mole end, and was certain that they never fired during the whole time that he was on shore.\* Adams also noted that barbed wire ran from No. 3 shed up to the end of the Mole, with at least one gap in it, and about 100 yards from the control station he could see what he took to be a trench, with stones heaped up in front of it. He then collected his men and led them with a rush along the pathway towards the guns, whereupon a machine-gun from behind the trench opened fire on his party, and some Germans, who were evidently advancing to meet him,

\* I have never been able to find out what these objects were which we took to be guns, but there can be no doubt that there were no guns there.

"VINDICTIVE"



Note:- At Midnight of 22/23 April the Height of Tide was 3 1/4 Ft. less than shewn

fired a volley and then retired. His small party suffered a good many casualties, and having no one in support, he fell back upon the control station and placed his men behind it. He then went back to get reinforcements and finding a few men of "B" Company—which had suffered severely in the *Vindictive* and had lost their officers, Lieutenant Chamberlain killed and Lieutenant Walker badly wounded—he took them back with him and led another rush along the parapet, but was again stopped by machine-gun fire, which caused several more casualties. He again took shelter behind the control station, but it was now under the fire of a machine-gun from one of the destroyers, which added to his losses.

Harrison, meantime, had recovered consciousness, and though terribly wounded in the jaw, now appeared and took command; he sent Adams back to ask for Marine reinforcements. Adams found Major Weller, who had succeeded to the command of the battalion, and asked him to send help. Major Weller ordered a platoon to support the bluejackets; but the siren had already sounded the recall and all Adams could do was to rejoin his men at the control station, where he learnt that Harrison had collected every man who could stand, and had led another rush along the pathway, until he and all his party were killed or wounded. Only one or two managed to crawl back to the shelter of the control station. They reported that Able-Seaman Eaves had endeavoured to carry Harrison's body back, but had himself been killed while doing so.\* Adams then recalled the men who had descended on to the Mole by the iron ladder, who had accounted for a few Germans in the shelters, and sent his party carrying their wounded back to the ship in obedience to the recall signal. While this was being done he went along the pathway again to try and find Harrison, and make certain that no wounded were being left behind, but the pathway was swept by machine-gun fire directly he appeared and he was lucky to escape.

After the *Vindictive* was berthed, Osborne left the foretop to lay the howitzers on to their target, having turned the top over to Lieutenant C. Rigby, R.M.A., with instructions to cover the

\* I am glad to record that this very gallant seaman was taken prisoner, very severely wounded, and survived to return to England.

landing party as far as possible—no easy task, for no enemy were in sight and it was difficult to locate the guns, which were hitting the *Vindictive* every few seconds, chiefly the funnels and upper works, splinters from which were causing many casualties. However, Rigby and his Marine artillerymen did yeoman service, and were probably responsible for preventing any hostile action in the enemy's destroyers, which were inactive for a long time. Unfortunately two shells—probably from the anti-aircraft guns near by on the Mole—wrecked the top, killed Rigby and killed or wounded every one else in it. Sergeant N. Finch, R.M.A., who was himself severely wounded, kept a Lewis gun in action until another direct hit completed the destruction of the whole armament of the top.

Meanwhile, Osborne, having ascertained where the *Vindictive* was actually berthed, and data having been previously worked out for every few yards, directed the howitzers to open fire on their selected targets. The 11-inch howitzer on the quarter-deck maintained a steady rate of fire on Goeben and the other batteries protecting the canal entrance, throughout the *Vindictive's* stay alongside the Mole, under the direction of Captain R. Dallas Brooks, R.M.A. The 7.5-inch on the false deck was to fire at the outer lock gate until the blockships arrived, in the hope that it would be run back into its shelter and thus let the *Thetis* in. It was afterwards to fire at the batteries; unfortunately the gun was damaged by a shell which caused several casualties, and it was out of action until shortly before the *Vindictive* left the Mole.

The 7.5-inch howitzer on the forecastle, which was to shell the seaplane sheds, never opened fire; the original crew, who were ordered to keep under shelter until the *Vindictive* was berthed, were killed or wounded before she arrived alongside the Mole; a relief gun's crew was provided from the six-inch battery, but were wiped out almost at once by a shell which must have come from the batteries to the westward of the Mole. Most of the casualties on board the *Vindictive* after she ran clear of the Mole battery were due to splinters caused by shells bursting against the upperworks and funnels.

As originally planned, “A,” “B” and “D” Companies of bluejackets were to attack the batteries on the Mole end and extension before the blockships passed; but as they were 340

yards further from their objective than was intended, with the intervening ground fully exposed to machine-gun fire from three directions, it was physically impossible for them to achieve their object, and so ended the gallant effort of the survivors of "A" and "B" Company to capture the guns on the Mole extension, which had inflicted such heavy loss on their comrades and had played such a decisive part in the action. During the whole of the engagement the bluejackets were never able to get to grips with the enemy, but were defeated by machine-gun and rifle-fire from a distance, as I had feared might happen, unless they could be landed right on top of the guns.

The first objective of the Marine storming force, was a fortified zone about 150 yards from the seaward end of the Mole; this object being gained, they were to continue down the Mole, and hold a position in order to cover the operations of the demolition party from an attack by enemy troops from the shore end of the Mole, which it was hoped by this time would have been turned into an island by the submarines.

Owing to the *Vindictive* going alongside well beyond the fortified zone, the Marines were faced with the double duty of preventing an enemy attack from the shore, and attacking the fortified zone from outside, instead of taking it in reverse as had been intended. Owing to the casualties they had sustained before the *Vindictive* was berthed, and the absence of the company carried in the *Iris*, they had insufficient men to carry out both operations. The situation was a difficult one; if they attacked the fortified zone first, the enemy might have advanced up the Mole and seized positions abreast the *Vindictive*, with most serious consequences to the whole landing force, whereas by not attacking the fortified zone, the guns at the end of the Mole could not be prevented from firing at the blockships. They proceeded, therefore, first to secure the landward side, and Captain Bamford and Lieutenant Cooke's platoon—who landed immediately after the bluejackets—reached a point about 200 yards ahead of the *Vindictive*, after which an assault was organised under Bamford against the fortified zone, but the unavoidable delay prevented this attack from being carried through before the blockships had passed in and the recall had sounded.

Lack of men prevented Major Weller from adequately reinforcing the bluejacket storming party. When the recall was

sounded the units fell back in good order, bringing their wounded with them. The passing of the men from the Mole on to the parapet, by means of the scaling ladders, was rendered hazardous by the enemy opening fire at that portion of the Mole, several ladders being destroyed; the men were sent across in small batches from the comparative shelter afforded by No. 3 shed, such rushes taking place, as far as possible, in the intervals between the enemy's bursts of fire.

Owing to the failure of the storming parties to advance to their objectives, the demolition party, under Lieutenant C. Dickinson, were unable to carry out the work assigned to them, but they were among the last to leave the Mole.

At about 12.50, the blockships having been seen to pass into the harbour, Carpenter had ordered the *Daffodil* to sound the recall, as all the searchlights and sirens in the *Vindictive* had been destroyed. After waiting about 20 minutes, as no further men were returning, he requested *Daffodil* to tow *Vindictive's* bow away from the Mole. The hawser parted almost at once, but the ship's head was already well clear of the Mole and, thanks to her smoke-screen, she was not hit again on her way out.

There were many acts of individual gallantry, besides those I have mentioned, during that brief hour on the Mole, as the records of the decorations and medals for valour, conspicuous gallantry and distinguished services show. Amongst those who survived and particularly distinguished themselves, were Captains Bamford and Chater, and Lieutenants Lamplough and Cooke, and Sergeant-Major Thatcher of the Royal Marines. Cooke was wounded and was carrying another wounded man back, when he was hit again and fell unconscious, but his batman, Private Press, who was also wounded, succeeded in carrying his officer back to the ship.

On board the *Vindictive*, Carpenter, Osborne, Brooks, Ferguson, Rosoman and Bramble and a number of men seem to have borne charmed lives as they went about their work. The two latter, though painfully wounded in the legs (Rosoman twice), crawled and hopped about, stuck to their work and refused to stay below; as did Hilton Young. Walker, too, was splendid, cheering and waving on the few survivors of his company after he had been hit by a shell which took off his hand.

When Halahan was killed, Edwards, who was standing alongside him, fell shot through both legs; finding that he could not move, he ordered two men who passed to carry him on to the Mole, as things did not seem to be going too well. However, in spite of his protests, they carried him below and thus probably saved his life.

Hilton Young—who received a wound early in the action which subsequently necessitated the amputation of his right arm—in a vivid account of his experiences, says that after he had had his wound dressed: “I went up one of the brows on to the Mole in order to see how they were resting. The swell, which had been very bad at first, was diminishing and such of the brows as survived, seemed to be resting comfortably enough.”\* This was fortunate, otherwise the embarkation of the wounded, which was carried out with devoted bravery, up the scaling ladders from the Mole and across the brows, would have been well nigh impossible. Some lost their lives whilst so occupied, including Captain Tuckey of the Royal Marines.

Davidson was right about Peshall the Padre, and that night, in addition to helping many gallant souls to pass he saved many lives. Like Harrison he had played Rugby for England, and exerting his great strength, he went backwards and forwards to the Mole carrying the wounded back on his shoulders until the ship left.

A shell hit a pile of boxes containing fused Stokes bombs and started a fire in the *Vindictive* which was difficult to extinguish. Petty Officer Youlton stamped on the burning material, without the smallest regard for his own safety, while shouting to others to take cover.

The *Daffodil* had passed the Mole battery without being hit. It was originally intended that after the *Vindictive* was secured the *Daffodil* should lie alongside her to disembark her men, but as the *Vindictive* was unable to secure herself the *Daffodil* continued to push her against the Mole throughout the action. The seamanship displayed by Lieutenant Harold Campbell, who during the greater part of the time was suffering from a wound in the head, which temporarily deprived him of the sight of

\* “By Sea and Land,” by E. Hilton Young.

one eye, was admirable; and the devotion of the engineers and stokers, who maintained a pressure of steam far higher, I was told, than had ever been attained previously, enabled the *Daffodil* to keep the *Vindictive* pinned to the wall in the strong tideway for 55 minutes. During this time, a shell entered the engine-room and two compartments were filled, and the escape of the *Daffodil* was little short of a miracle, as she was a target for the guns to the west of the Mole, whenever the smoke blew clear. Campbell's skill and devotion undoubtedly saved the *Vindictive's* assault from being an utter failure; but for the *Daffodil*, very few of the *Vindictive's* storming party could have been landed, and hardly any could have been re-embarked.

Meanwhile the *Iris* had been going through a very difficult time. Unfortunately her tow had parted at 11.11 p.m. and being unable to keep up, she reached the Mole ten minutes after the *Vindictive*. Like the *Daffodil* she passed the Mole extension battery without being hit, and went alongside the Mole and dropped her starboard anchor. Owing to the scend she bumped heavily and great difficulty was experienced in placing the parapet anchors. An attempt was made to land by the scaling ladders before the ship was secured; Lieutenant Claud Hawkings, of “D” Company, managed to get one ladder in position and actually reached the parapet, the ladder being crashed to pieces just as he stepped off it. This very gallant young officer was last seen defending himself with his revolver, and was killed on the parapet.

Lieut.-Commander Bradford, commanding “D” Company, then climbed up the derrick rigged out over the port side, which carried a large parapet anchor. During this climb the ship was surging up and down and the derrick was crashing against the wall. Waiting his opportunity, he jumped with the parapet anchor on to the Mole and placed it in position. Immediately after hooking the anchor on the parapet, Bradford was riddled with machine-gun bullets, and fell into the sea between the Mole and the ship. Most gallant efforts were made to recover his body, and Petty Officer Hallihan lost his life trying to do so. Unfortunately the anchor tore away when the strain came on it. Commander Gibbs, realising the impossibility of securing the ship in this position, slipped his starboard anchor and, going round the *Daffodil's* stern, secured



alongside *Vindictive's* starboard quarter, and commenced to disembark "D" Company of bluejackets and the Marines; but by this time the recall was sounded and very few got across the *Vindictive*.

While all this was going on, the submarines had been approaching their destination, and at 11.26 p.m. *C*<sub>3</sub> slipped her tow. Sandford finding *C*<sub>1</sub> and the picket-boat were not in company, nevertheless proceeded on the pre-arranged courses, and duly sighted the viaduct right ahead, at a distance of about one and a half miles. *C*<sub>3</sub> being illuminated by the star-shells, came under the fire of some four-inch guns to the westward of the Mole, but this was not long maintained. When the viaduct was approximately half a mile off, a flare on the far side silhouetted the Mole and the viaduct. Two searchlights were then switched on to *C*<sub>3</sub> and off again after a minute or two. Sandford turned on his smoke, but found that it drifted to seaward and was useless.

By this time the viaduct was clearly visible 100 yards away, course was altered to insure striking the viaduct exactly at right angles. Sandford was now well placed to abandon ship and make use of the gyro steering gear, but decided not to risk failure by doing so, but to ram the viaduct with the crew on board. Indeed, I do not believe that he, or his brother, ever intended to make use of it, and they only installed it to save me from a subsequent charge of having condemned six men to practically certain death.

As the submarine approached, men could be seen on the viaduct and could be heard laughing and talking, and there can be little doubt that the enemy were amused at the thought of catching a British submarine alive in the network of their viaduct. Probably this was also the reason why the searchlights switched off, after they had picked up *C*<sub>3</sub> in their beam.

*C*<sub>3</sub> struck the viaduct exactly between two rows of piers, at a speed of nine and a half knots, riding up on to the horizontal girders of the viaduct, which raised the hull bodily about two feet; she penetrated up to the conning-tower. The crew, having mustered on deck before the collision, lowered and manned the skiff. The fuses were then ignited and the submarine abandoned. It was now found that the propeller of the skiff had been damaged, and the crew had to get out their oars

and pull as hard as they could to the westward, against the current, to prevent their skiff being swept under the viaduct. Immediately the skiff left the submarine, the two searchlights were switched on and fire was opened by machine-guns, rifles and pom-poms, the viaduct being lined by riflemen firing under the windscreen. The boat was holed many times, but was kept afloat by the special pumps which had been fitted. Sandford and two of his crew were severely wounded, but Lieutenant Howell Price and the other two men succeeded in getting about 200 yards away, before the submarine blew up with a tremendous explosion, hurling 100 feet of the viaduct and all upon it into the air. Debris fell all round the boat, both searchlights were extinguished and after that there was very little firing.

The elder Sandford had been in great difficulties. His picket-boat had made very bad weather under tow, and after being nearly on her beam ends twice and shipping a good deal of water, eventually, when abreast of “G” buoy, she was actually thrown on to her beam ends, and the parting of the tow alone saved her from capsizing. She then proceeded at full speed under her own steam, steering directly for the Mole, in the hope of arriving at the viaduct before the explosion occurred. Although she was not able to do this, she arrived in time to pick up the skiff in a sinking condition a few minutes later, and eventually transferred the crew to the *Phæbe*. The picket-boat subsequently returned to Dover under her own steam, as her fore compartment being holed and full of water, made towing inadvisable. From first to last, she had made a voyage of 170 miles to and from the Belgian coast in unpleasant conditions, and Lieut.-Commander F. Sandford had effected the rescue in face of almost insurmountable difficulties.

C<sub>1</sub> had unfortunately parted her tow soon after leaving “G” buoy, which had caused considerable delay, and she did not arrive in the vicinity of the Mole until after the retirement commenced. Newbold had seen the C<sub>3</sub> explosion and decided that he had better keep his boat for future use, for which he and his crew volunteered.

In the *Warwick*, meantime, having listened to the rapid burst of fire from the Mole and extension, which was distinguishable from the roar of heavy shells passing overhead, we could hear

machine-guns and pom-poms, and must have passed very close to the *Vindictive*, judging by the proximity of the fire, though we could not see her in the smoke. I then directed Victor Campbell to steer towards the end of the Mole, to cover the approach of the blockships. The *Phæbe* and *North Star* followed us for some minutes, but before long lost touch in the smoke, as we had to make one or two sudden alterations of course, to avoid the M.L.s, which were most gallantly carrying out their inshore duties. On two or three occasions, finding them exposed and under fire, the *Warwick* laid smoke between them and the Mole extension battery, which opened fire promptly upon anything that appeared out of the smoke. On about four occasions we all felt very naked when we emerged from the smoke and salvos splashed round us, but the *Warwick* was only hit in the rigging. On these occasions smoke was turned on and we swung round behind it; of course similar tactics were pursued by the many other craft engaged, and the disappearance of our vessels, probably accounts for the numerous vessels which the enemy claims to have sunk. A good many people had good reason that night to be thankful that I had waited for Brock's smoke.

Whilst so engaged, the three blockships passed us, steaming the correct course for the Mole end, and almost at the same moment there was a huge sheet of flame which lit up the sky, and Tomkinson remarked, "There goes the submarine." We expected to hear a tremendous explosion, but the roar of the guns was so terrific, that we did not distinguish it. The success of the submarine was a great relief, as there was evidently a bitter fight going on on the Mole, the machine-gun and pom-pom fire being incessant, but I knew now that no reinforcements could arrive. I told Campbell to run alongside the *Vindictive*, as I was anxious to see how she was faring. Somehow he missed her in the smoke, and we ran almost alongside the Mole well beyond the *Iris* berth, and though we could not see her, her First Lieutenant (Oscar Henderson) told me he saw my flag pass close by, with the cross of St. George appearing above the smoke, although the *Warwick* was not visible.

Standing on the compass platform, in the position in which we found ourselves, abreast of one of the electric cranes on the Mole, we could see clearly over the parapet, and in the light of

the enemy's star-shells, we could distinguish all three blockships in the canal entrance. Whether they successfully blocked the canal or not, the *Vindictive* could do no more to help them. So I told Campbell to take me alongside the *Vindictive* without any delay, as I wished to tell Carpenter that the blockships were in the canal, and order the boarding ships to withdraw, unless I found the situation on the Mole very favourable; the demolition part of the programme not being worth the sacrifice of more lives.

The *Warwick* swung round and at 1.10, while closing the Mole to get in touch with the *Vindictive*, by the light of the star-shells, we could see her leaving the Mole and proceeding to the north-east. Campbell had to put the *Warwick's* helm hard over to turn clear of her; we then followed in her wake, as I wished to make sure she was all right. The shore batteries were firing hard at this time, but the *Vindictive* put up a good smoke-screen and she did not appear to be hit; we ran into her smoke, which accounts for our not seeing the *Iris* and *Daffodil*. After following her for some minutes, and coming to the conclusion that, judging by her speed, her steaming qualities, at any rate, were undamaged, we eased down to try and get in touch with the *Iris* and *Daffodil* to see if they needed help, but we failed to find them. We then ran in towards the Mole again and fell in with four M.L.s, one of which told us that all the boarding vessels had passed her standing to seaward, which was a great relief to me.

When the *Iris* had left the Mole she had achieved nothing, and the only casualties she had suffered were the two officers and the petty officer whose conspicuous gallantry I have mentioned. When she was ordered to shove off from the *Vindictive* she stood to the northward; owing to some misfortune her smoke apparatus hung fire and failed to work. The wind was now blowing from the southward and the C.M.B.s were unable to keep anything like an effective smoke-screen to mask the extension battery, which, sighting the *Iris*, poured a hot fire into her. She was hit ten times by small shell and twice by large shell from the shore. The port side of the bridge was blown away. Major C. Eagles was killed, Commander Gibbs was mortally and Lieutenant Spencer, R.N.R., severely wounded. He nevertheless continued to con the ship until he was relieved

by Lieutenant Oscar Henderson, who, assisted by Able-Seaman F. Lake, had been engaged in quenching a serious fire under the bridge in the vicinity of the ammunition and bombs, which they threw overboard. Oscar Henderson then took command of the ship and stood out to seaward.

The losses in the *Iris* were very severe, because her decks were crowded with men; and of her gallant company—who had suffered the bitter disappointment of being unable to land and take part in the action—eight officers and 69 men were killed and 3 officers and 102 men were wounded.

She was saved from further punishment by the gallant action of *ML558*, which went full speed towards her and made a dense smoke-screen across her wake. The Surgeon attached to the Marines on board was Captain F. Pocock, R.A.M.C., who had to do all the work himself as all his staff were casualties. He certainly saved many lives.

Harold Campbell's laconic record of his magnificent night's work is worthy of record:

“The proceedings of H.M.S. *Daffodil* were in accordance with the instructions issued by the Vice-Admiral, Dover, and the ship commenced to push the *Vindictive* towards the Mole shortly after midnight.

This operation was continued until orders were received for the Force to leave the Mole, when *Daffodil* attempted to tow the bow of *Vindictive* off the Mole, but hawser parted shortly after taking initial strain. Observing, however, that *Vindictive* had cleared the Mole, *Daffodil* then proceeded independently, and was eventually taken in tow by *Trident* about 2 a.m. and taken to Dover, where vessel arrived about 1 p.m., 23rd April. All officers and men fully upheld the traditions of the Navy.”

While the *Warwick* was following the boarding ships, the *North Star*, which had lost touch with us in the smoke fairly early in the proceedings, was endeavouring to rejoin me, when she lost her bearings in the smoke and, emerging from it, found herself quite close to the shore to the south-eastward of the lighthouse. Swinging to starboard to avoid grounding, ships were sighted ahead, which proved to be the blockships, and

almost simultaneously Lieut.-Commander Helyar saw a ship lying alongside the Mole, at which he fired a torpedo. The *North Star* was then picked up by a searchlight on the starboard beam, and the enemy's batteries opened fire on her. Helyar put the helm hard-a-port and stood out to seaward, firing all his torpedoes at the destroyers alongside the Mole as he passed, but being under heavy fire he was unable to observe the effect. The *North Star* passed the lighthouse at a distance of about 100 yards, under port helm, and received two salvoes in the engine- and boiler-rooms at point-blank range. All the boilers were put out of action and the engine-room was wrecked; the ship finally stopped about 400 yards north-east from the Mole at 1.25 a.m.

Fortunately the *Phæbe* was at hand and sighted her in the light of the enemy's star-shells, and Gore Langton made a smoke-screen round her and attempted to take her in tow; the hawser parted once, and was shot away once. The *Phæbe* then ran alongside and attempted to take her in tow that way, without success; by that time the smoke had blown clear; the *North Star* was riddled with holes, was in a sinking condition and was being repeatedly hit, as was the *Phæbe*.

Gore Langton considered that there was no chance of saving the *North Star* and therefore that he was not justified in risking his own ship further. He advised Helyar to abandon his ship and laid a smoke-screen to windward of her, while the crew were being transferred in boats, finally he ran alongside and eventually induced Helyar to leave his ship, which was sinking under him.

Unfortunately one of the *North Star's* boats capsized and some of the crew were believed to have been drowned, but we learnt later that some if not all of the missing men were picked up by the Germans in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### "Z.O." BLOCKING THE CANAL

C.M.B. and M.L. operations; The *Thetis* enters Harbour; Heavily shelled; Sinks outside Canal; *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* follow; Sink in Canal; Heroic rescue work by M.Ls.; *Warwick* picks up survivors.

ALTHOUGH engine trouble prevented a few of the C.M.B.s completely carrying out all the duties assigned to them, they played a very important part in the execution of the plan, and the waves of smoke they made at high speed, behind which the force advanced were, as I had hoped, most effective, and enabled the M.L.s and destroyers which followed, to close in without loss.

The zest of the young officers was admirable. One instance shows the eagerness of the officers to take part in a fight from which circumstances tried to exclude them.

Lieutenant Edward E. Hill in *CMB35A* had the misfortune to foul his propellers when already 18 miles on the way. He got a tow from a drifter and arrived back at Dover at 8 p.m. His boat was immediately hoisted and the propellers cleared, but as there was other damage, he was not afloat again until 9.40 p.m. He then made his way at full speed to the Belgian coast, and was off Zeebrugge (about 70 miles) by 11.50, taking up his smoke patrol at once.

Lieutenants Welman and J. Annesley commanded the two C.M.B.s of "V" Unit, detailed to place smoke-floats under the Mole extension battery and mask its fire until it was captured. With complete disregard for their own safety, these two officers made every endeavour to keep the battery masked, by replacing the smoke-floats when they were sunk by rifle and machine-gun fire, and by rushing exhaust smoke-screens across, they often succeeded in interfering with its fire; despite the difficulties experienced from the fitful changes of wind, which occurred about midnight, when the north-easterly sea breeze died away. Annesley and all his crew were wounded.

It was a cruel misfortune that the wind should have blown the smoke-screen back, just as the *Vindictive* passed the battery. Hilton Young describes it as follows :

"Casting a glance out through the embrasure I saw a fine sight. The wind during the last few minutes had dropped, the smoke-screen was no longer drifting ahead of us, and the sea and everything on it was lit up continuously by leaping flashes, so that we were plainly visible to the gunners on the Mole. Quick as thought one of the motor craft grasped the situation and dashed forward, leaping—almost flying—across the waves with furious haste, pouring out smoke as she came. She swung across our bows, right between us and the batteries and under the very muzzles of their guns, and vanished into her own smoke unharmed. It was a gallant act, and glorious to see."\*

Other C.M.B.s greatly assisted the M.L.s to maintain the screen, by rushing exhaust smoke across dangerous gaps and covering the M.L.s when exposed by the change of wind.

The torpedo attacks on the vessels alongside the Mole were carried out with conspicuous bravery under a heavy fire ; and the C.M.B.s fitted with Stokes mortars ran almost alongside the Mole abreast of the seaplane sheds, under machine-gun and pom-pom fire, to drop their projectiles over the parapet. Lieutenant Dayrell-Reed, Sub-Lieutenant Robert Blake and Lieutenant C. Bowlby, particularly distinguished themselves in these three services respectively.

Captain Ralph Collins, who was embarked in *ML*558 (Lieut.-Commander L. Chappell, R.N.V.R.), was very active throughout the engagement. He led the four M.L.s (Unit "C") which were detailed to remain off the Mole and cover the boarding vessels from the northward ; they were thus in a very exposed position and *ML*424 was sunk, Lieutenant O. Robinson, R.N.V.R., and two deckhands being killed. The second in command (Lieutenant J. W. Robinson) and the remainder of the crew escaped in their dinghy and were subsequently picked up by another M.L.

\*"By Sea and Land," by E. Hilton Young.



The four M.L.s detailed for rescue work (Units "T" and "Q") were manned by volunteers. Unit "T," *ML282* (Lieutenant P. T. Dean, R.N.V.R.) and *ML526* (Lieutenant H. Littleton, R.N.V.R.) followed the *Iphigenia*. Unit "Q," *ML110* (Lieut.-Commander D. Young) and *ML128* (Lieut.-Commander R. Saunders) were to lay calcium flares to the eastward of the lighthouse, as a guide to the blockships, shortly before they were due, and were afterwards to follow them in. *ML110* was proceeding to her station, when she ran out of the smoke-screen and was struck by three shells which completely disabled her, and killed Young and the leading deckhand, the spare officer (Lieutenant Lee) and two deckhands were wounded. The second in command (Lieutenant G. Bowen) succeeded in placing all the survivors in the dinghy and abandoned her before she sank. The other—*ML128*—had developed engine defects soon after leaving "G" buoy, and she did not reach the Mole until after the blockships had gone in.

Of the other M.L.s, the 16 smoke makers (Units "G" and "I") carried out their duties most efficiently, under very difficult conditions, owing to changing wind. Baffles had been fitted to the smoke-floats, but some of these failed to work and emitted a glare. This at once drew a heavy fire, which generally sank the floats, and added considerably to the perils of the M.L.s in their vicinity, which however promptly replaced them, and then escaped behind their exhaust smoke. On the other hand, *ML314* (Lieutenant G. S. Maxwell) was directed to lay three smoke-floats without baffles, a quarter of a mile apart, very close to the shore, with the object of drawing the enemy's fire, which they did most successfully.

When the *Thetis*—the leader of the three ships which were to play the principal part in our enterprise—neared her goal, and punctual to the minute approached the Mole, *ML558* closed her, and Captain Collins gave her the bearing of the lighthouse, which she made right ahead on the pre-arranged course.

The *Vindictive* fired rockets at the appointed time, which lit up the lighthouse clearly, but the *Thetis* must have been hidden from the battery by smoke, until she had almost reached the lighthouse, as only two or three shots were fired at her before she rounded it. By that time she had increased to full speed,

and signalled to her consorts to do likewise. Sighting the barge-boom, as she rounded the lighthouse, Sneyd endeavoured to ram the end barge, finding his vessel swinging to port—probably under the influence of the tide, which was running through the harbour to the eastward—he put her helm hard-a-port, but failed to ram the barge, and the *Thetis* tore through the net defence between the two outer buoys, carrying it with her. By this time the guns on the Mole extension were hitting her with salvo after salvo. The *Thetis* fired back at the Mole extension guns, and at a barge mounting a gun, which she sank. The piers of the canal entrance were in sight, when both engines were reported to have brought up. The *Thetis* had cleared the net obstruction away, enough to enable the ships following to pass to starboard of her, and she signalled to them to do so. Being then about 300 yards from the eastern pier-head and having drifted slightly to port (shoreward) she appears to have grounded. She had a list to starboard, and was settling down, having been frequently holed along the starboard side by gunfire. She was continually hit from the Mole, from craft alongside it, and from a battery on the eastern side of the canal (probably the Goeben eight-inch battery). One or two machine-guns were also firing at the ship, her six-inch fore-castle gun replied, until her own smoke made it impossible to see. Communication with the engine-room having broken down, a messenger was sent, and Engineer Lieut.-Commander R. C. Boddie succeeded in re-starting the starboard engine, which moved the ship ahead, and she swung to starboard into the dredged channel. As she appeared to be sinking, Sneyd cleared the boiler-rooms, sent the boat keepers to their boats, ordered the smoke to be turned on, and the ship to be abandoned. The foremost firing keys had not been brought to the firing position, owing to the petty officer in charge of them being killed. Smoke and shell fumes prevented their being found, so that the sinking charges were fired by the after keys; they detonated well and the ship sank quickly. The whole ship's company manned the one remaining cutter and pulled to *ML526* (Lieutenant Hugh Littleton, R.N.V.R.) which was lying near the ship. Although crowded and holed in two or three places, the cutter was got away without any confusion by Lieutenant G. D. Belben; Commander Sneyd and Lieutenant F. J. Lambert being disabled by gas.

Lieutenant Bonham Carter reported that as : "The *Intrepid* approached the Mole, they came under heavy shrapnel and light flares ('flaming onions'); these were useless to the enemy on account of the smoke-screen." After passing round the lighthouse she proceeded to the canal entrance, directed by the *Thetis*, which was aground on her port hand. Very few guns fired at her and she suffered no damage. There was now nothing to prevent her from ramming the lock gates, or if open, running into the lock. However, in obedience to his orders, on reaching the narrow part of the canal entrance, Bonham Carter put the *Intrepid's* helm hard-a-starboard, and went full speed ahead starboard, and full speed astern port. He then waited for the crew to get into their boats, but finding that the ship had stern way, and fearing that she would swing into the channel, instead of lying across it, he blew his charges without waiting for the engine-room to be cleared.

Owing to the presence of the surplus crews, the boats were overcrowded. Engineer Sub-Lieutenant Meikle took charge of a cutter load and pulled into the harbour, where they were picked up by *ML*526. Another cutter pulled right out to sea and was picked up by the *Whirlwind*, and a skiff load was picked up by *ML*282.

Bonham Carter, Lieutenant A. Cory Wright, Sub-Lieutenant Dudley Babb and four petty officers were the last to leave in a Carley float, and they paddled down the canal until picked up by *ML*282. The Carley float had a calcium flare, which they had great difficulty in detaching, and until they did so, it attracted the fire of the machine-guns on shore, which they avoided as much as possible by dropping overboard and keeping as low as they could.

Incredible as it may seem, of the *Intrepid's* crew of 87 officers and men, the only casualty was one petty officer, killed by machine-gun fire while on board *ML*282.

The following account of the *Iphigenia's* proceedings is the report made the next day by Lieutenant Billyard Leake :

"I have the honour to report that your orders were carried out as nearly as possible. At Position "D" I was unable to discharge 12 engine-room ratings [the stowaways], having to proceed in accordance with the

programme, these ratings then joined up with the remainder of the engine-room staff.

On approaching the Mole, we came under shrapnel fire and light flares, also two searchlights on the western end of the Mole. These flares were of no use to the enemy and simplified navigation. On rounding the Mole I lost station, so proceeded at full speed. Shortly after turning, the harbour was lit by star-shell, which showed the *Intrepid* heading for the canal and *Thetis* aground. On approaching the *Thetis* a green light was shown on her starboard side, which enabled me to find the entrance to the canal.

The ship was hit twice on the starboard side, one shell cutting the steam-pipes, and enveloping the fore part of the ship in steam. On approaching the canal entrance it became obscured with smoke, and I found I was heading for the western pier. I went full speed astern and brought the ship in between a dredger and barge, severing the barge from the dredger. I then went ahead starboard, and drove the barge up the canal. As soon as I was clear of the barge, I went ahead both engines, and sighted the *Intrepid* aground on the western bank, with a gap between her bows and the eastern bank. I endeavoured to close this gap, but collided with the port bow of *Intrepid* while turning. I then rang my alarm gong. Finding I was not completely blocking the channel, I rang down astern which got through to the engine-room. As soon as I was clear, I sent Lieutenant Vaux to the engine-room with an order to go ahead, which was promptly obeyed. The entire entrance was then covered in smoke.

As soon as I considered the ship had headway, I went astern port, ahead starboard, helm hard-a-starboard, and grounded on the eastern bank. I then abandoned ship and fired my charges, which all exploded. The ship's company left the ship in one cutter, as the other one was badly damaged. While in the cutter we came under more shrapnel and machine-gun fire, which caused some casualties. While endeavouring to pull clear, I sighted the bows of *ML282* across the stem of the ship and pulled up to her. The majority of the crew managed to get into the motor launch, which then went astern. The remainder in the

cutter pulled round the stern and the motor launch came up and picked them up.

The cutter was then made fast to the stem of the motor launch, which proceeded out of the harbour at full speed astern. I cannot speak too highly on the conduct of this motor launch, she being entirely responsible for saving the survivors from the *Iphigenia*. Heavy fire was concentrated on the motor launch, as well as machine-gun fire, on the passage out. We were eventually picked up by H.M.S. *Warwick*.

Lieutenant P. E. Vaux, my First Lieutenant and navigator, has been of the greatest value during all the navigation on the journey over, and only left the bridge at my order, on rounding the Mole.

I regret to report that Sub-Lieutenant Lloyd was badly wounded in the motor launch, but up till then had taken charge aft. Mate (E) West has throughout the operation and preparations worked his department in an admirable manner. He returned to the engine-room after the alarm bell had been rung, in order to put the engines ahead, and finally left at my order. I cannot recommend the crew individually, as they all behaved so splendidly.

E. W. Billyard-Leake,  
Lieutenant, R.N."

24th April, 1918.

This modest tale is a very inadequate record of this cool-headed young officer's remarkable display of judgment, initiative and good seamanship.

We were relying on the stems of the two blockships to penetrate the silt and ground hard and fast against the pavé bottom on either side of the canal bank. Billyard Leake having expected to find the *Intrepid's* bow run up on the eastern bank, in accordance with her orders (*see* page 214), was intended to ram the western bank and swing the *Iphigenia's* stern across the channel until it grounded on the eastern bank.

Having navigated his ship into a position in which he could easily have carried out his orders, he found that the *Intrepid* had been sunk with her bow well clear of the eastern bank, though her stern appeared to be very close to the western bank. It must have been a temptation to him to obey his orders, which

he was in a position to do with absolute certainty of success. To have risked personal success, by going astern in that narrow channel, under shell and machine-gun fire, with the possibility of losing his bearings in the smoke and escaping steam, in order to try and retrieve the *Intrepid's* failure, was an altogether admirable decision.

When he eventually had manœuvred the *Iphigenia* into a position in which he could swing her bow across the gap left by the *Intrepid*, and did so, he was still not content, but continued to work his ship round, with her propellers going ahead and astern, until both ends of his ship were firmly embedded in the silt.

Dean, whose M.L. was lying off, exposed to machine-gun fire at very close range, and impatiently waiting for the *Iphigenia* to sink, told me he thought: “The damned fellow would never stop juggling with his engines.”

Immense credit is due to Ralph Sneyd, the cool, collected leader, whose ship had borne the whole brunt of the enemy's fire, which reduced her to a sinking condition, and killed or wounded 20 per cent. of his crew; nevertheless, having cleared the way for his consorts, he continued to direct them until they reached their goal.

But if it had not been for Billyard Leake's gallant initiative, the efforts of his two colleagues might well have been in vain.

It is astounding that the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* should have suffered so little from the guns on the extension and the destroyers alongside the Mole. I am of the opinion (based on a subsequent close examination of the extension battery and the arrangements for the supply of ammunition), that the guns were directed towards the shore, pounding the *Thetis* in the harbour, while the other ships, hidden in the smoke, slipped by from seaward; and that the supply of ready ammunition on the pathway had run out by the time they entered the harbour.

Goeben Battery and other shore guns also seem to have concentrated on the *Thetis*, after the Mole extension battery had reduced her to a sinking condition, with the result that the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* were able to enter the canal almost undamaged. The destroyers failure to fire torpedoes is accounted for by the fact (disclosed in German accounts), that the men were nearly all ashore in dug-outs, where some of them were

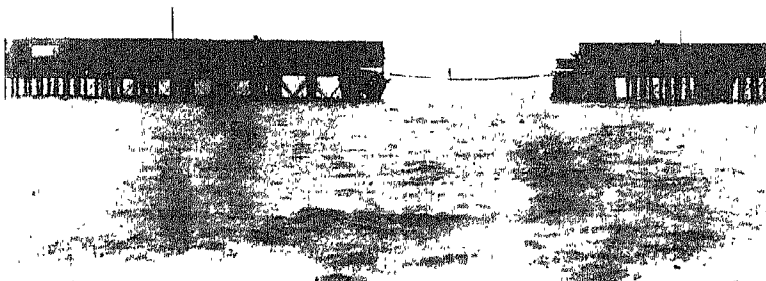
found and killed by our men. Their machine-guns, which took such heavy toll of the storming parties on the Mole, were being manned by officers, who happened to be having a party on board.

The rescue work of *ML*526 and *ML*282 was simply magnificent, and but for them, very few of the blockships' crews would have escaped. Littleton carried out his work with the greatest gallantry and brought away all the survivors of the *Thetis* and towed the *Intrepid's* cutter out.

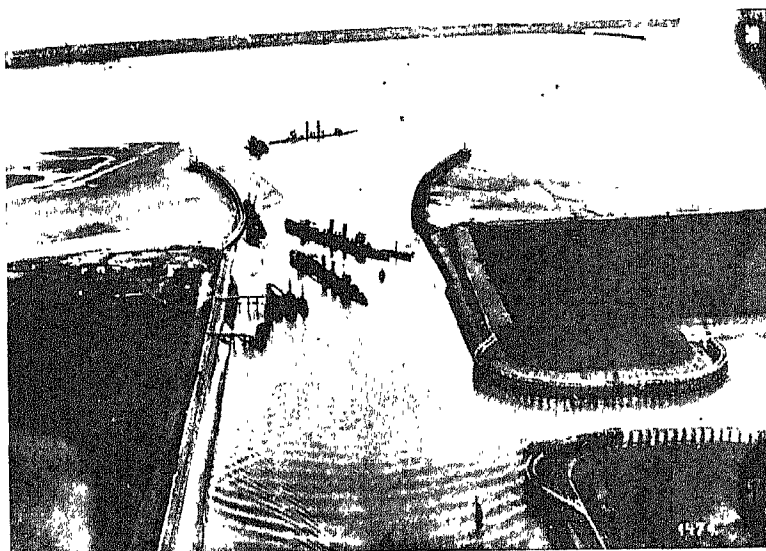
Owing to the breakdown of *ML*128, and the sinking of *ML*110, Dean was left with the task of bringing out all the rest of the blockships' crews, about double the number he anticipated. His skill and heroic determination was simply incredible. Under a deadly machine- and heavy gunfire, he embarked over 100 officers and men in his frail craft. Hearing that an officer had been left behind in the water, he returned into the canal and picked him up. Having no room to turn, he went out full speed astern, towing a cutter from his stem, handling his ship with his engines, his steering gear having been damaged. When about to pass the Mole end battery, he ran in under the Mole and rounded the extension so close, that the guns could not be depressed to fire on him, and he kept them in line while he went to seaward.

Throughout the escape, the M.L. was under constant machine-gun fire; Dean's Second in Command and three of his four deckhands were shot down beside him, and a great many of his passengers were killed and wounded.

After the withdrawal of the boarding vessels, the *Warwick* stood in again towards Zeebrugge to look for stragglers, and fortunately met *ML*282 coming out. She was crowded, simply packed with men, who stood up and cheered wildly when they saw the *Warwick*. I hailed Dean and asked him how many people he had picked up, he replied about 70, and it seemed too good to be true. He said he had a great many wounded and I told him to come alongside. As the M.L.'s helm was put hard over to do so, she took the ugly list of a top-heavy, overladen vessel. I don't suppose an M.L. would be licensed to carry more than 50 people in the quiet waters of the Thames; but 101 were counted out, including a good many killed and 20 odd wounded. All this took some time,



GAP IN VIADUCT MADE BY SUBMARINE C<sub>3</sub>



BLOCKSHIPS IN CANAL

Taken from German Aeroplane, 23rd April, 1918





and we were still within range, but were covered by the smoke or mist, and by the time we were able to shape course to seaward, all was quiet, and it seemed very dark after the brilliant illumination which we had experienced throughout the action.

Dean's passengers were the survivors of the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia*, including their Captains, who came up on to the bridge at once to report to me. Billyard Leake might have stepped straight out of a military tailor's shop, equipped for the trenches, leather coat, shrapnel helmet all complete, very erect and absolutely unperturbed. He saluted and reported that he had sunk the *Iphigenia* with her bow hard aground on the eastern, and her stern on the western bank, in the narrow part of the canal.

Bonham Carter, bareheaded and dressed in a dirty wet vest and trousers—as he had been swimming in the canal in water covered with oil from the sunken blockships—made a good contrast. He said that he had sunk the *Intrepid* across the canal and thought that she filled the fairway.

Among the dangerously wounded on board were Sub-Lieutenants Lloyd (of the *Iphigenia*) and Keith Wright, R.N.V.R. (Dean's Second in Command). They were both shot through the middle and the Doctor declared that they could not survive. Lloyd had the *Iphigenia's* white ensign wrapped round his waist, and it was saturated with his blood. I think he knew that his number was up, but was perfectly happy and fearfully proud of having been able to bring away the ensign, which I told him he should keep.

Keith Wright was suffering severely; I told him how splendidly his M.L. had done, and how distressed I was that he should have been so badly wounded. He said that he would not have missed it for anything, and that was the spirit of all that gallant throng.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE RETURN TO DOVER

Ships re-assemble at Thornton Ridge; *Warwick* passes *Vindictive* homeward bound; Wounded discharged to *Liberty*; Message to Admiralty; *Vindictive* arrives; Announcement in House of Commons; Ostend Operation; *Daffodil* and *Iris* return; King's Message; Honours and Congratulations; Dinner at Fleet House; Decide to repeat Ostend Operation; Queen of the Belgians visit; Air Raids; A Meeting with Wemyss; Visit Sir Douglas Haig and Admiral Ronarch; V.C. Ballot; Marine Battalion dispersed; Funeral and Memorial Service; Enemy submarines active; Two submarines sunk; German prisoners' report.

ON returning to Thornton Ridge, I found the *Attentive*, heavy monitors, and a number of small craft, which had withdrawn from the inshore positions, including the *Iris* and *Daffodil*, already there, and learnt that the *Vindictive* had passed on her way to Dover.

The *Warwick* having more wounded on board than her young Surgeon could really cope with, I signalled to the *Erebus* to send a Surgeon; but while waiting for him, I directed the *Warwick* to close the *Iris*, and hailed Gibbs, to ask how she had fared and whether she had many casualties. A voice replied that she was all right, but had very heavy casualties. Tomkinson and I could have sworn that Gibbs answered, and being much attached to him, felt thankful to hear his voice. But Valentine Gibbs (who in the winter before the War had won the Cresta Run race) was lying below, mortally wounded, with both legs blown off, though I did not know it until many hours later.

On hearing of the *Iris's* heavy casualties, I sent the *Erebus's* Surgeon to her. I then requested Commodore Boyle to look out for stragglers, and to cover the withdrawal with his force and the monitors; and after sending a brief message through him to the Admiralty (my cipher and signal books having been destroyed), to say that the blockships had been sunk in the canal entrance and the boarding ships were homeward bound, I ordered the *Warwick* to proceed to Dover with all dispatch.

When we were nearing Dover, we overhauled the *Vindictive*, with her upper works looking very battered and with smoke and flames pouring out of the holes in her funnels, but actually steaming at about 17 knots. After learning the extent of her casualties, and letting her know that the blockships had been sunk in the canal, I signalled: "Operation successful. Well done, *Vindictive*," and went on to Dover, the ships cheering one another as we passed.

On arrival at Dover, we ran alongside the hospital yacht *Liberty*, and discharged the wounded into her.

I then sent the following telegram to the Admiralty:

"Operation carried out at Zeebrugge in accordance with plan, except that aerial attack was not possible owing to mist and rain. The *Vindictive*, *Iris* and *Daffodil* remained alongside Mole about an hour. Casualties believed to be about 400. The three ships were successfully withdrawn and are returning. *Thetis* grounded to the eastward of the canal entrance. Captains of *Iphigenia* and *Intrepid* consider that their vessels were sunk in correct positions. Seven officers and 87 men (of whom one officer and 17 men are wounded) of these two ships were brought away by a motor launch. One officer and 60 men not accounted for. No news of *Thetis* crew yet. All destroyers and most of the small craft are believed to be returning. *C1* did not reach destination and is returning. *C3* was blown up apparently in correct position. Visibility very low. Search is being made for stragglers. Further report follows."

While waiting for the *Vindictive* to come alongside, one of the Naval Transport officers asked me what had been happening, and when I told him, he said that he had a son in the 4th Battalion Royal Marines, but knew nothing about the enterprise, and thought that the battalion had gone to France; so when I told him, he was in great anxiety, until he saw his son as the *Vindictive* came alongside.

This speaks well for the way our secret had been kept at Dover, where there were so many people who had taken part in our previous efforts of a fortnight earlier.

Soon after 8 a.m. the *Vindictive* arrived and was berthed alongside the Admiralty pier, where hospital trains were waiting, and most of the wounded were transferred straight into them.

After a brief report from Carpenter, I went to my office to telephone to Admiral Wemyss, who I knew would be anxiously waiting for my report, and I told him all I knew at the time. He said he would go at once to Buckingham Palace to tell the King. So I told him about Lloyd and Keith Wright, who were not expected to live many hours, and said that as the only posthumous honour was the V.C., I was most anxious that they should be given decorations before they died, and begged him to ask the King to grant Keith Wright a D.S.C. and Lloyd a bar to the one he had already won.

I then went to breakfast with my wife, who had spent an anxious night listening to the sound of the guns on the Belgian Coast, which rattled her windows. She told me that she had sat up until about 3 a.m., when she had a strong feeling that all was well, and that I was on my way home, so went to bed, as she knew that there would be much to do in the morning, and was woken by a telephone message, saying that the operation had been successful and that the *Warwick* was coming in shortly.

Soon after breakfast Admiral Wemyss telephoned that His Majesty had said that he was delighted to give the honours I had suggested to the two gallant young officers, and he only hoped that they would live to wear them.

My wife and I went straight on board the *Liberty* and told them. They were both conscious and fearfully pleased, but Lloyd died that day. Keith Wright, however, started to improve from that moment, and I am glad to say completely recovered. My wife had bought all the roses she could get in Dover, and gave each of the wounded one to wear for St. George's Day.

By this time the wounded from the *Vindictive* were in the hospital train and we went to see them off. Amongst the many we talked to was Edwards, the one-eyed warrior, who I was surprised to find somewhat depressed; knowing, I suppose, that the assault on the Mole had not achieved all its objects; and he asked me how the blockships had fared. My message that morning had evidently not reached him. When I told him that the blockships were in the canal, and most of

their crews had been saved, as well as the crew of the submarine, he was simply delighted.\*

A good many men were taking pieces of concrete with them as souvenirs of the Mole, a large piece weighing over a hundred-weight having fallen on board the *Vindictive* while she was alongside. This was eventually sent to the War Museum.

In the meantime news had come from Dunkirk about the Ostend attack, and I sent a telegram to the Admiralty, the gist of which was announced in the House of Commons that afternoon by Sir Eric Geddes (*see* Appendix II). It certainly made no boastful claims, admitted that the attack on Ostend was a failure, that there might possibly be a narrow channel along the eastern side of the canal at Zeebrugge at high water (based on an aeroplane report which proved to be inaccurate), and incidentally made no mention of the *Warwick's* proceedings.

The details of the plan of attack at Ostend were very similar to those of Zeebrugge. The C.M.B.s and M.L.s laid and tended the smoke-screens, and the destroyers, led by the *Faulknor* flying Commodore Lynes' broad pennant, supported them in the offing. Special arrangements were made to mark the Stroom Bank whistle buoy, and the bell buoy off Ostend, with Brock's calcium light buoys, laid by C.M.B.s; calcium light buoys were also laid, two off the western and one off the eastern entrance piers, shortly before the blockships were due. One of the rescue M.L.s lay off the whistle buoy and signalled with a screened lamp in the direction of the approaching blockships.

All went well until 12.15 a.m., when the wind, which had been N.W., backed to S.S.W., and made the carefully laid smoke-screen go wrong at the critical moment; and the calcium light buoys, which had been well screened from the shore by the smoke-screen, were exposed and sunk by gunfire.

The *Brilliant* and *Sirius*, attended by their destroyers, and preceded by two C.M.B.s, arrived at the charted position of the Stroom Bank buoy at the programme time, but not sighting it, Godsal stood on for one minute, and then altered course for the harbour entrance. However, unfortunately, he then sighted the M.L. standing by the whistle buoy, about a mile to the eastward, so he stood towards it, and passing close to the buoy,

\* When he recovered he went out to North Russia, and, I believe, collected another wound there.

then altered course again for the harbour's mouth, using the position of the whistle buoy as a departure point. But the buoy had been moved 2,400 yards to the eastward by the Germans, and the adverse smoke prevented him seeing anything that might have enabled him to retrieve the error, before the blockships ran ashore, without sighting the land, exactly the relative distance to the eastward of the Ostend piers. It was cruel luck, and it certainly was no fault of Godsál or Hardy, that their ships missed their goal.

As the ships were only a few hundred yards from several powerful batteries, and within machine-gun range, and were repeatedly hit, both before and after they grounded, the escape of the crews with only slight casualties was amazing good fortune, and was entirely due to the M.L.s, which followed in and took them off under a storm of fire.

Captain Hamilton Benn in *ML532* was the first on the scene, and reported with many regrets, that he had damaged his M.L. so severely by clumsily ramming the *Sirius*, when he went alongside her, that she was too badly damaged to embark anyone. However, when his M.L. was examined on her return, it was found that the damage she had sustained was due to a German shell, which had burst in her fore compartment, evidently just as she ran alongside. A good many pieces of the shell remained to exonerate Hamilton Benn from the charge of mishandling his ship. His seamanship was indeed as admirable as his gallant spirit.

In the meantime a whaler had left the *Brilliant* full of men, but was much damaged by machine-gun fire, and there were many people still left on board; however, *ML283* (Lieut.-Commander Robin Hoare, R.N.V.R.) and *ML276* (Lieutenant Roland Bourke, R.N.V.R.) were at hand; the former took off the *Brilliant's* crew, and Bourke, after taking off everyone in the *Sirius*, found the *Brilliant's* whaler in a sinking condition and embarked its crew. He then picked up the damaged *ML532* and towed it to Dunkirk.

Hardy and his second in command (Lieutenant Berthon) counted heads, and finding that Engineer-Lieutenant Maclaren and several men were missing, hailed a C.M.B. (Sub-Lieutenant P. Clarke), and went back in search of them. They ran alongside both ships, which were still under considerable fire, and found

them deserted. The missing officer and men had pulled to seaward in a whaler, and were picked up some hours later by the *Attentive* about 13 miles away.

The monitors had an important part to play off Ostend. The enemy coastal batteries which commanded the approach were very formidable, and the *Prince Eugene* (Captain E. Wigram), *Marshal Soult* (Captain Blount), *Lord Clive* (Commander R. Watson) and *General Craufurd* (Commander E. Altham) were anchored in selected positions—of necessity well within the range of the inland heavy batteries (Tirpitz and Jacobynessen), which also had to be kept under fire—in order to keep them occupied, while the coastal batteries which menaced the block-ships were heavily engaged. Small monitors were anchored in fixed positions, to show aiming lights to check the gyro directors.

Five minutes after they opened fire, the enemy replied, and dropped a good many shells round the monitors, particularly the *General Craufurd*, which was engaging the coastal batteries, and she was fortunate to escape damage. In Commodore Lynes' opinion, the monitors and the Royal Marine siege guns under Lieut.-Colonel Peacock, undoubtedly harassed and misled the enemy, and it was satisfactory to note, in the aerial photographs, many new shell holes round the guns they engaged.

French destroyers, torpedo-boats and M.L.s co-operated with ours in this operation, and screened and attended the bombarding monitors.

Lieutenant Harrison commanding the C.M.B.s, of course selected the most exposed position for himself, and laid the calcium light buoys in the entrance to Ostend under a hail of machine-gun fire, which damaged his boat and severely wounded the motor mechanic.

The *Daffodil* arrived at Dover about 1 p.m. in tow of the *Trident*, and I went on board to commend Harold Campbell and his gallant crew for the splendid service they had rendered to the *Vindictive*; and I took him back with me to Fleet House.

The *Iris* came in about two hours later, and I went down to see Gibbs, to sympathise with him for his bad luck, for I knew how bitterly disappointed he must be feeling over the *Iris's* failure to land her men.

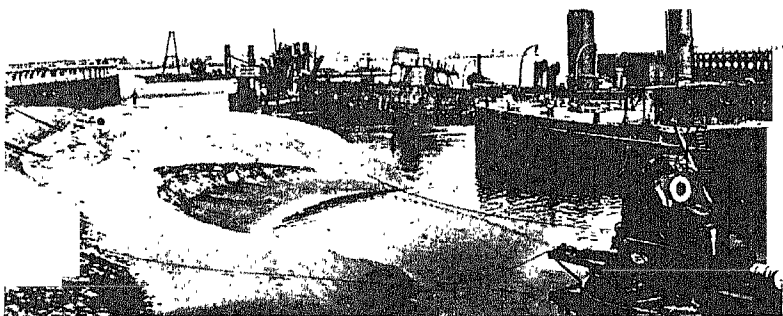


It gave me a heartache to see, as she came alongside, rows of dead lying on her poop. I had no idea that Gibbs was dead, but when I saw her young First Lieutenant Oscar Henderson on the bridge, I feared that he must be wounded, and I was shocked to hear that he had died about 9 o'clock that morning, having remained conscious until the last, in spite of his terrible wounds. Henderson told me, that though Gibbs was very distressed at the *Iris's* failure, and the heavy losses she had suffered, his principal thoughts seemed to be for me, and he repeated over and over again, that he only hoped that I had had a great success and had achieved my object.

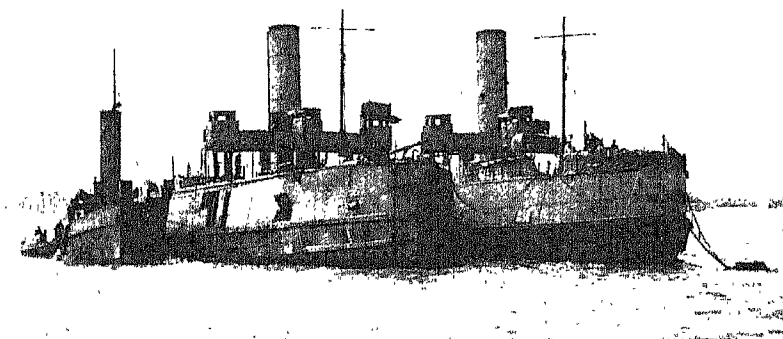
It seems that they were in complete ignorance as to what had occurred, until they arrived at Dover, and only knew that they and the *Vindictive* had had a very rough time. After I had hailed the *Iris* at Thornton Ridge, we had drifted apart, and I had directed a signal to be made, to tell her that the blockships were in the canal and that the operation was successful, but all her signalmen and wireless ratings had been killed or wounded. One signalman, Bryant, was lying very badly wounded, and hearing that a signalman was wanted, asked for a flashing lamp, and insisted on being propped up to reply, but he sank back unconscious almost at once, leaving a steady light burning, so the *Warwick* signalman thought that the message had been taken in; and Henderson was not told that his report of Gibbs' wound had not reached me.

Maj.-General Sir Bernard Hickie had taken command of the garrison at Dover a few days before, and he came to see me that morning, full of congratulations. He asked to be introduced to my wife, and by way of greeting said: "I am so pleased to meet Mrs. Roger Keyes, because I am sure that I shall be the last person to call you that." This was prophetic, for within an hour, I received a telegram to say that His Majesty had been pleased to appoint me a Knight Commander of the Bath.

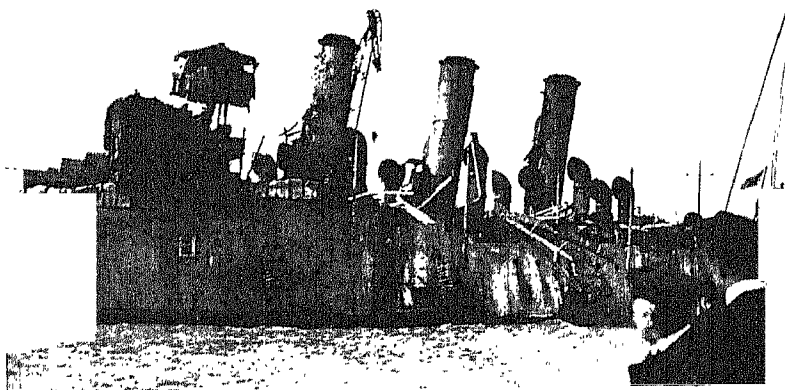
I hoped that others would be promptly honoured, but the only other to receive recognition was Carpenter, whose acting rank was confirmed. He had been of great service to me, so I was delighted that he had got his promotion; but I protested to Admiral Wemyss, that it was unfair that he should be promoted over Ralph Sneyd, who was senior to Carpenter as a



ZEEBRUGGE CANAL BLOCKED. DEAD LOW WATER  
 Photograph found on a German prisoner



*IRIS AND DAFFODIL AT DOVER,*  
 23RD APRIL, 1918



*VINDICTIVE ENTERING DOVER*  
 23RD APRIL, 1918



Commander, and had led the blockships so gallantly, and I pressed for his immediate promotion as well. Wemyss promised that Sneyd should be promoted when the *Gazette* covering all the honours for the enterprise was published, and that he should be dated back to 23rd April; thinking that this would occur shortly, I told Sneyd, and was content to wait.

All that afternoon and evening and during the next few days, telegrams of congratulation came pouring into Dover from all over the world, which amazed me. The Lords Commissioners thanked us. . . . The First Lord sent warmest congratulations. Beatty telegraphed at once: "Well done, Roger. We anxiously await news, and were with you in spirit"; and later he expressed the pride of the Grand Fleet in the achievement, and their satisfaction that their contingent should have played such a gallant part. The Submarine Flotillas sent me several messages, and one ran: "We are proud that our Commodore should have delivered the goods." Many messages came from my friends in the Grand Fleet, and I greatly appreciated de Robeck's "from your old comrades on the Staff and myself."

Admiral Ronarc'h sent me a charming telegram and also a message from the French officers and men who had taken part: "Proud to serve under the same Commander as the British ships, whose dash and courage they have witnessed at Ostend, and deeply honoured at his high praise. The French units will be happy to again fight in their ranks, and to strive to equal them in their bravery. I send you their thanks."

In reply to a telegram from Lambe, sending the Airmen's congratulations, I told them how greatly I deplored the bad luck they had suffered, in being deprived by rain from repeating the gallant bombing attacks of 11th-12th, which would have been an immense help during our last attack, and said how grateful I was for their invaluable assistance. Without the numerous preliminary reconnaissances which they carried out, and the wonderful photographs they had produced, the enterprise could not have been undertaken. The screening of the force on passage had prevented a premature disclosure of our plans.

My wife had prepared every bed in the house and we put up as many of the officers of the blockships and *Vindictive* as

it would hold. Some of them had to go to the hotel, but as many as possible came to dinner, and it was most interesting listening to all their experiences, and my wife was thrilled. Billyard Leake had a wound in his leg, which he had not reported, as he did not want to be sent to hospital, and was going on leave next morning; my wife was rather concerned about it, but he said it had been dressed, and the house he was going to had been turned into a War Hospital, so that it would be well looked after there. (It turned out to be quite bad, as a piece of his trousers was embedded in the leg, and he was laid up for some time.) Harold Campbell had also not gone to hospital, but he promised her that he would go to an oculist in London next morning, and we heard later that he had been kept in a dark room for three weeks.

I had received a message of congratulation from the King, which I read out at dinner: "Most heartily congratulate you and the forces under your command who carried out last night's operation with such success. The splendid gallantry displayed by all under exceptionally hazardous circumstances fills me with pride and admiration." This gracious message filled us with pride, and we drank His Majesty's health.

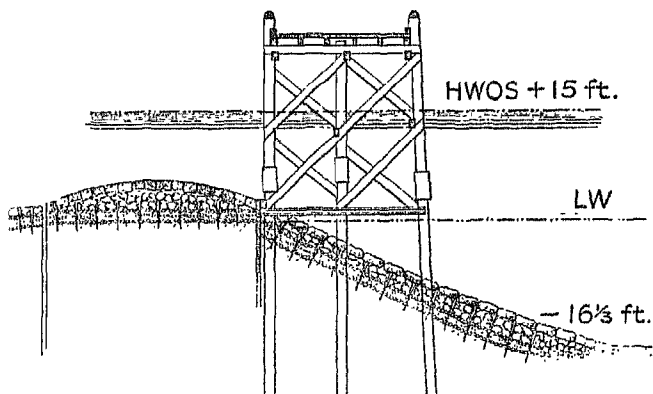
I think we all had rather mixed feelings that night. We knew that two blockships had been sunk in the position, in which (according to the best expert opinion), they would certainly block one exit of the Bruges canal system, and as far as Zeebrugge was concerned, we felt that we had done our task and nothing else mattered. But we had all lost good friends and comrades, and my thoughts constantly turned to those gallant souls, who had so ardently welcomed the opportunity of doing something, which would add honour and merit to that which our Service had gained in the past. Their intrepid leaders had shared my secret from the first and had worked for many weeks in the training of the personnel and the preparation of material. It seemed so hard that so many of them should not have lived to see the success of their endeavours. Halahan and Gibbs, whom I had known as midshipmen in the China War, when they had both seized opportunities of proving their worth; Elliot born in the great traditions of the Sea Regiment, in which his father and forbears since 1716 had served; and Brock, the gallant optimist, whose inventions had been so invaluable to us.

We, who had been at Zeebrugge, felt very sorry for the Ostend members of the party, who were bitterly disappointed at their failure, and begged to be allowed to try again, and suggested that we should use the *Vindictive* as a blockship.

I went to bed that night determined to make another attempt to block Ostend, before the present period ended if possible, if the Admiralty would only agree.

The solid sides of the channel were steeper to, at Ostend, than those of the canal at Zeebrugge (*see plan*), and if the *Vindictive* could be rammed on the western bank at high water, the east-

### West Pier Ostend



going tide, which would still be running strong, would swing her round until her stern grounded on the eastern bank; and the ship was long enough to block the canal completely, if we could only get her into that position.

A thorough examination of the *Vindictive* next morning having shown that the damage she had suffered could be repaired in a few hours, sufficiently to enable her to cross the Channel, I telephoned to Admiral Wemyss and said, that in view of the failure of the *Brilliant* and *Sirius*, I proposed to block the Ostend canal with the *Vindictive*, and the Admiralty approved.

It was necessary to trim her to the right draught, and fill up available spaces to prevent salvage; rather a big job, and we

were very short of men. I took the General into my confidence, he was splendid, and provided a large party of soldiers to fill bags with rubble and concrete.

All the blockship people had been sent off on leave as soon as possible, and I arranged that Godsál—who was to have command—should have a crew made up of volunteers from the destroyers and monitors of the Dover Patrol. Godsál's coxswain (Petty Officer Reed) begged to stay with him. I had intended to allow the Senior Engineer of the Ostend blockships to take charge of the *Vindictive's* engines, but Engineer-Lieut.-Commander Bury protested warmly against leaving the ship, and said it simply was not fair to the new Captain, that a stranger who did not know the engines, should be in charge of them at such a critical time, and that it was essential that he and four of his engine-room artificers should remain in the ship to steam her across, her engines were so difficult to handle, etc. which of course was sheer nonsense, but his ardour appealed to me, so I consented.

Dampier and his dockyard set to work with great energy to repair the *Vindictive's* wounds. A new standard compass had to be fitted, most of the communications had to be replaced, and of course it was necessary to take the ship out and swing her for deviation of the compass. This was done by Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne—the Navigator of the *Lord Clive*, who, when he learnt the *Vindictive's* destination, begged to be allowed to remain in her as Navigator. I thought that this would be a great advantage, as the approach this time would be through the shoals surrounding Dunkirk, which he knew well. I was anxious, however, not to risk more officers and men than were absolutely necessary, and I told Godsál that Sub-Lieutenant Maclachlan, who had been with him in the *Brilliant*, must stand down. The crew was reduced to the minimum of 39 (15 less than the *Brilliant* had carried), and I think that every officer and man on board her must have known that, after the last attempt, the chances of escape would be slender.

When the *Vindictive* was ready for sea, there were still three days left of the period, but the days that followed the 23rd April were all unsuitable, and it is a fact that had we not sailed on the 22nd, the Zeebrugge Operation could not have been carried out in that period.

The next period during which the necessary conditions recurred was between the 9th and 14th May, and a detailed time-table was prepared for each night within those dates. The nights were shortening rapidly, and it was essential that the movements of vessels in the vicinity of, and approaching the Belgian Coast, should be delayed until it was sufficiently dark to avoid risk of observation by enemy aircraft.

There were, however, other governing factors, which had to be taken into consideration. The blockships had to approach through channels which had been swept, until waters were reached, which were known (by observation) to be used by the enemy.

On the 9th May, the blockships could not arrive at Ostend until an hour after high water. It was, however, important to include every possible night in the period, since experience had shown how very seldom the necessary conditions of wind, weather and tide occurred. (Only once—22nd–23rd April—during the two previous periods covering a month.)

Fortunately the best possible local experience was available, that of the Captains of the Belgian Ostend–Dover Packet boats, who had spent years going in and out of Ostend, and whose vessels were now working in my command as transports.

As we now had eleven days or so to wait, I asked for the *Sappho*, which had been in the original list of blockships. She was a depot ship in Southampton Water, and it was not very convenient to give her up; however, the Admiralty ordered her to be fitted out at once, and Hardy took command of her, accompanied by his old officers and a volunteer crew we provided, reduced similarly to that of the *Vindictive*.

The secret was well kept, and it amused us to read a demand in one of the newspapers, that the *Vindictive* should be sent to the Thames, to be preserved as a memorial. I hated all the fuss that was being made, and told Admiral Wemyss that I would open the seacocks and sink her in the Channel, rather than condemn her to such a fate; however I hoped to make much better use of her.

On the morning of the 24th, the Press Censor had sent down an army of reporters, eager for copy. I did not wish to be interviewed, and Commodore Boyle was far too busy, so I gave orders for them to be allowed on board the *Vindictive*;



and there they were met by Captain Carpenter, who told them all about the *Vindictive's* part in the enterprise, which was published in all the papers as "Captain Carpenter's Story," rather an irregular proceeding for the Navy.

"Carpenter's Story" and the battered *Vindictive*, which was much photographed, of course, called a great deal of attention to her doings, and the blockships and submarine, which had done their part so well, and were lying in the enemy's waters, were quite put in the shade by it. When I pointed this out to Carpenter, he told me that he thought that the officers of those ships would also tell their story. The younger Sandford was lying dangerously wounded in hospital; the elder was always modest and reticent. The blockship Captains, who were staying in my house, were safe from interviewers, but a number of officers were staying in the Burlington Hotel, and they were attacked before breakfast, but escaped being interviewed by begging for a respite until, say, 9.30, knowing full well that by then they would be in the train, bound for "a spot of leave," to quote one of their number.

Some very exaggerated accounts and boastful claims appeared in the papers, and I felt ashamed that so much fuss was being made, and wondered what the Army would think, who were doing the same sort of thing, and suffering far heavier losses every day. But I had no need to worry about that, for in the course of the next few days, I received scores of telegrams from battalions, Divisions, Corps and Armies, as well as from individual friends, and best of all from the Army's great Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, whose telegram gave us immense pleasure:

"On behalf of the Army in France, please accept for yourself and all ranks engaged, our most hearty congratulations on the success of your operation against Zeebrugge and Ostend. St. George's Day was indeed a fitting date for such a daring feat of arms."

It happened that the Queen of the Belgians had crossed to Dover in one of our destroyers on the 19th, and lunched with us at Fleet House, on her way to see her eldest son, Prince Leopold, who was at Eton, and her daughter, who was being

educated in England. She returned to Dover on the 24th April, on her way back to La Panne with her younger son, Prince Charles, who was on leave from Dartmouth. She was absolutely thrilled about our Operation, and took many photographs of the *Vindictive*, ferry steamers, etc., and a group on our doorstep of some of the officers who were staying with us, who had the honour of meeting her at lunch.

The aerial reports we received on the 23rd, by telephone from Dunkirk, were excellent, but it was very satisfactory to see the photographs which arrived later, and clearly showed the blockships in the canal, the hole in the viaduct of the Mole, and a great many destroyers and torpedo-boats and a few submarines in the basins at Bruges; others were certain to be under the massive submarine shelter, which held at least twelve submarines.

I was anxious to bomb the torpedo-craft at once, and told Lambe to do so night and day, with all the aircraft he could raise. The Royal Air Force had only been in existence for three weeks, but the new arrangement had already begun to destroy the Royal Naval Air Service, which had been a *corps d'élite*—the finest air unit in the world—and had simply dominated the air on the left flank, and on the Belgian front, during the last three months.

After I had taken the responsibility of sending our squadrons down into the battle in March, to help the Royal Flying Corps, they found them so valuable, that they would not send some of them back; and apart from this loss, we were deprived of a good many of our Handley-Page night bombers, to provide the R.A.F. with an Independent Air Force for long-distance bombing raids.

Consequently we were not able to inflict anything like the damage we might have done at first, had we still possessed all our R.N.A.S. squadrons; for the enemy's torpedo-craft were lying secured in threes, and in the aerial photographs looked like salmon in a pool waiting for a spate. After a few air raids, they were dispersed for safety along the canals round Bruges. One position, in the vicinity of a big red cross painted on a white circle to mark a hospital, was a very popular berth, and was always occupied.

On the 25th, Admiral Wemyss telephoned to say that he wanted to see me, but was too busy to come to Dover, and as he did not suppose that I could spare the time to come to London, he suggested that we should meet half-way at Maidstone. We met in an hotel, talked things over and made plans for the future.

Sir Douglas Haig had telegraphed about the 20th, to ask me to come over and see him, when I could spare the time. I could not well go on the eve of our Zeebrugge expedition, and was very much rushed afterwards for a few days, but telegraphed to say that I would visit him at G.H.Q. on the 26th April. He replied, asking me to go to the Second Army's Headquarters at Cassel. When I arrived, I found that General Plumer, the Army Commander, had moved his Headquarters some way back from the town, as Cassel was well within gun-range of the enemy, who had driven the French off Mount Kemmel, and occupied it. I was told that the French regarded Mount Kemmel as of vital importance, and had insisted on taking it over from us, only to lose it within a day or two, and it was evident that there was a good deal of feeling about the matter.

Our meeting took place in the abandoned Headquarters on Mount Cassel, and from the General's office, Sir Douglas Haig, General Plumer and I watched our guns blowing the top off Mount Kemmel, which must have been a very unpleasant spot to occupy. The Generals were exceedingly nice to me about our efforts on the Belgian Coast, but the atmosphere was rather depressing, and I could see that they were having a very anxious time.

Sir Douglas told me that he had asked me to come over in order to inform me, that as it was essential to keep contact with the left flank of the French Army, he might have to fall back beyond the Channel ports, and Dunkirk might well have to be abandoned before long.

I said, that in that case, we would have to start a new kind of war, from a naval point of view; it was difficult enough now, to safeguard his communications across the Straits, and the immense volume of trade which passed into the Thames every day. Dunkirk was vital to us, and the strong force I kept there, was in fact, an outpost on the enemy's flank, ready to strike, if he should venture far from his Flanders base. It was

this force, which made it possible to maintain in safety the anti-submarine measures across the Straits, and the immense transport of the Army.

I then told him exactly what it meant to us, and said that I would send him a memorandum, which I had written for Admiral Wemyss a few days earlier, on learning that the War Cabinet were considering the possibilities Sir Douglas Haig had just mentioned to me.

Sir Douglas said that it was a choice of evils, and we simply could not afford to lose touch with the French left, and heaven only knew where that would be before long. Before I left, Major-General Percy (General Plumer's Chief of Staff), came in with a very disquieting report from the Liaison Officer with the French.

My memorandum was as follows :

"Dunkirk is the advanced base of our monitors, destroyers and motor boats, for the maintenance of the Belgian Coast blockade and for offensive operations against the Belgian Coast generally. It is quite recognised that this service is not vital in regard to the general situation.

The possession of Dunkirk is, however, of most vital importance to the Naval situation, in that it makes it possible to base a strong force on the flank of any attack on the Straits Patrol. The enemy's forces at Zeebrugge are already a constant menace, but their activities are undoubtedly governed by the threat of our Dunkirk force, on the flank of their line of retreat should they venture far afield. If they possess Dunkirk they will be relieved of this anxiety and have far greater freedom of action.

If Dunkirk is lost and, even if it is most thoroughly and permanently wrecked, the enemy would be able to use Ostend without molestation, and having possession of the coast would be able to maintain a force under cover of their batteries, which would make the advanced positions, now occupied by our Patrols, untenable. Moreover it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the minefield auxiliary patrol—without which our anti-submarine measures would become practically valueless—within such easy reach of the enemy.

To maintain control of the Straits, it is absolutely essential for the southern flank of the Patrol to rest on the French Coast. Apart from the admirable strategic situation of Dunkirk as an outpost to the Patrol, there is good accommodation in the Port, and the roads are well protected by shoals from torpedo attack. With Dunkirk lost, it would be necessary to fall back on Calais which is already congested, and the roads of which are open to torpedo attack.

Dunkirk is at present occasionally shelled from a distance of 27 miles. Before long Calais would be under long-range fire. The extent of the withdrawal which the loss of Dunkirk would entail is not known, but it seems probable that Calais as a port of disembarkation would soon become untenable. It would certainly be very open to a raid.

The loss of Calais and consequent loss of the control of the Straits would be, in my opinion, nothing short of disaster.

I understand that the question of giving up the French Channel Ports is seriously contemplated under certain eventualities, in order to shorten the line and maintain contact between the British and French Armies. Whether it will be possible to maintain our Army's sea communications, without the Richborough, Dover and Folkestone to Calais and Boulogne traffic, is a matter outside my knowledge. But I can say most definitely, that with the French Coast, say as far as Boulogne, in the hands of the enemy, his submarines will have free access to the Channel, and the raiding by fast surface craft of our cross-Channel traffic, which can be maintained under cover of coast batteries, will be a very simple operation unattended by much risk. Indeed, the vast volume of trade which passes in and out of the Thames Estuary would be most seriously threatened.

Before placing the maintenance of contact between the French and British Army, above the retention of the control of the Dover Straits—which can be made absolute under existing conditions, with mines and other devices in course of preparation—it would be as well to make absolutely certain that we would be able to maintain the British

Army in France, without the control of the Straits, under the conditions which would then exist in the Channel.

15/4/18.

ROGER KEYES."

I went back to Dunkirk feeling rather depressed, and had a long talk with Admiral Ronarc'h; I left him feeling much cheered, as the gallant Admiral, who had played such a distinguished part in the defence of Dixmude, declared that not only could Dunkirk be held, but that *we* would hold it whatever happened !

The Admiralty gave orders for the 4th Battalion Royal Marines to be dispersed, and the three companies were to return to their depots on 27th April. Having not received any special recommendations for the Victoria Cross, I told Major Weller, the night before, to select an officer and a man, by ballot, to represent the battalion, in order that I might forward the names for His Majesty's approval, under Rule 13 of the V.C. regulations (*see* Appendix III).

During the Gallipoli Campaign, Admiral de Robeck had had infinite difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of decorations, to adequately reward the many actions of conspicuous gallantry and distinguished service, which were performed by people under his command ; and I knew that I was in for a pretty hard fight to get the services of my people properly recognised. So I short-circuited any opposition the Admiralty might raise, to granting the Marines two V.C.s, by claiming the right to do so under Rule 7, which I knew had been exercised once or twice in the Crimea, and during the Indian Mutiny.

I went to Deal on the morning of the 27th and said a few words of thanks to the 4th Battalion for their splendid services. They were assembled in a hollow square, and many of the lightly wounded were present. Major Weller announced that the officers had selected Captain Bamford, and the men Sergeant Finch, R.M.A.—for his gallant conduct in the foretop—for the Battalion V.C.s. They thus testified to the good comradeship of the Corps, since the vast majority of Light Infantrymen chose an Artilleryman to represent them.

When I got back to Dover, I telephoned to Admiral Wemyss and told him what I had done. It was rather stretching a point, and even Wemyss, who looked at everything in a big

way, was a bit shocked at my temerity. However, he never failed me, and went to see the King, who was most graciously pleased to approve, and said I could have a similar ballot for the naval force engaged in the assault on the Mole, if I wished to do so; as I had told Admiral Wemyss, I thought that two V.C.s should also be granted to them. This was going to be a much more difficult matter, as the officers and men of the three ships were scattered in all directions, and by that time the wounded were in half a dozen hospitals.

I asked Carpenter, who was the senior surviving naval officer, if he would recommend an officer and a man for conspicuous gallantry. He said he thought it would be invidious, everyone had done so splendidly, and he would prefer not to select individuals, and would not take part in the ballot, which I then had to arrange.

The officer selected could only be elected by officers, and Carpenter shorthanded Harold Campbell by one vote. Nearly all Adams' friends had been killed, and he was third. Able Seaman Mackenzie, who was with Adams on the Mole, and behaved—like his leader—with most conspicuous gallantry—received the men's V.C.

Having got His Majesty's approval about the four V.C.s, I then forwarded the recommendations through the Admiralty under Rule 13.

On the afternoon of the 27th, the funeral took place of all those whose relatives had not removed them for private burial. Two officers and 64 men were laid in one long grave in the little cemetery on the hillside, and the whole of Dover turned out to do them honour. My wife had ordered a big St. George's cross of red and white roses to put on the grave, in memory of the men who died so gallantly on St. George's Day, and there were flowers sent from all over England.

On Sunday, a Memorial Service was held in the parish church, and the Rev. M. Jackson (who had been attached to the naval siege guns under Halahan in Flanders), preached an eloquent sermon, the text of which was taken from Hall's English Chronicles (on which Shakespeare's "Henry V" was based). The passage concluded: "King Henry caused the Te Deum with certain anthems to be sung, giving lauds and praisings to God, and not boasting nor bragging of himself, nor his human

power." I hoped that this would be taken to heart by some people, who had been talking too much.

Soon after midnight on the 27th there had been a heavy explosion in the minefield, and oil came to the surface. It was considered certain that a submarine was there and the reward was paid, but the submarine was not identified.

We had an unpleasant experience on 29th and 30th April, when five British ships were torpedoed on the western edge of the Dover Patrol area; and it was reported that some hostile seaplanes had come right down to the barrage, evidently to try to discover what we had there, and they got back without being brought to action by our aircraft.

I was feeling very annoyed, when yet another British ship was sunk, at 2 a.m. on the 2nd May, quite close to our minefield patrol. However, at 8.10 a.m. that day, three drifters drove a submarine down on to the minefield, where she was destroyed, and identified later as *UB31*.

At 8.15 a.m., one of our little dirigibles ("Blimps"), *Z29*, sighted a dark object, which she took to be a submerged submarine; she directed two drifters to the spot, they sighted the submarine's periscope shortly afterwards, dropped depth charges above it and drove it down on to a mine, which exploded, and this was the end of *UC78*.

We were fortunate to have been able to avenge the losses inflicted by the enemy submarines so speedily. Both submarines were evidently trying to go home through the barrage at periscope depth, and the value of our dense patrol was thus clearly proved.

Meanwhile, the few aircraft we had left were very active. Flight-Commander Bachelor, in a Handley-Page machine, attacked the lock gates at Zeebrugge, from a height of 200 feet, at 3 a.m. on the 3rd May, and dropped three 500 lb. bombs in its vicinity. The attack was not successful, but the pilot and observer were both wounded in this very gallant attempt.

That afternoon, our old monitors bombarded the Ostend area; in fact we kept the enemy pretty busy during those days.

A very thorough aerial survey of the Bruges-Ostend canal, reported that nothing but barges were moving in it. Our Intelligence Department were quite certain that destroyers and large submarines could not use it, but I was still anxious



to close the exit at Ostend to torpedo-boats and small submarines, and as the next possible period drew near, we repeated our short time mining off Ostend, with the destroyer *Meteor*, which was fitted for laying mines, and C.M.B.s, which laid them in the very entrance of Ostend.

The aerial photographs disclosed that the planking of all the piers along the coast had been removed, and a quantity of new barbed wire entanglements erected, which amused us, as it proved that the Germans were really alarmed.

On the 5th May, the *Broke* rescued two Germans from a damaged seaplane; they were sent to London, and it was reported to me by the Naval Intelligence Department, that they were overheard talking to another German prisoner and had said, that our attack on Ostend was a failure, but that:

“The blockships at Zeebrugge were sunk in the canal entrance, effectively blocking ingress and egress of even small craft. The sand is silting up, despite dredging, and the general opinion is that dredging is hopeless. It is intended to blow up the blockships.

On the Mole, direct communication with the mainland has been interrupted. No other serious damage to Mole from torpedoes. The Seaplane Base was not damaged by the explosion at the gap, and was not reached by the landing party. Seaplanes work as usual.

One British officer and about 12 men were taken prisoners on the Mole. No knowledge of other casualties.

German casualties: Eight were killed on the Mole. Number of wounded were not known but were numerous.

German ships lost: One dredger was sunk in the harbour,\* and possibly one T.B.D. outside. Old T.B. was bombed by the landing party without result.

The Germans admit that the raid on Zeebrugge was completely successful, and they regard the effective blocking of the canal as a serious mishap. There were a considerable number of submarines at Bruges at the time of the raid.”

These reports, which confirmed the aerial survey, satisfied us that the Zeebrugge enterprise was a very definite success.

\* This could be clearly seen in the aerial photographs at low water.

## CHAPTER XXV

### GERMAN STORIES

German Official Reports ; British Reports ; Captain Schulz' Account.

AFTER our attack on the 23rd April, the Germans issued the following official telegram, which speaks for itself :

“ During Monday-Tuesday night (22nd-23rd April) an enterprise of the British naval forces against our Flanders bases, conceived on a large scale and planned regardless of sacrifice, was frustrated.

After a violent bombardment from the sea, small cruisers, escorted by numerous destroyers and motor-boats, under cover of a thick veil of artificial fog, pushed forward near Ostend and Zeebrugge to quite near the coast, with the intention of destroying the locks and harbour works there.

According to the statements of prisoners, a detachment of four companies of the Royal Marines was to occupy the Mole of Zeebrugge by a *coup de main*, in order to destroy all the structures, guns, and war material on it, and the vessels lying in the harbour. Only about 40 of them got on the Mole. These fell into our hands, some alive, some dead. On the narrow high wall of the Mole, both parties fought with the greatest fierceness.

Of the English naval forces which participated in the attack the small cruisers *Virginia* [*Iphigenia*], *Intrepid*, *Sirius*, and two others of similar construction whose names are unknown, were sunk close off the coast. Moreover three torpedo-boat destroyers and a considerable number of torpedo motor-boats were sunk by our artillery fire. Only a few men of the crews could be saved by us.

Beyond damage caused to the Mole by a torpedo hit [*C3* ?] our harbour works are quite undamaged. Of our naval forces, only one torpedo-boat suffered damage of the lightest character. Our casualties are small.”

Some German newspaper accounts were more appreciative ; the *Hamburger Nachrichten* said that : " The attack was carried out by the British with great skill and extraordinary pluck."

Naval Captain von Pustau, writing in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, said : " Their plucky action merits all recognition."

Count Reventlow in the *Tageszeitung*, assumed that " The attempt to make both of the Flanders bases inserviceable is not the last, even though it may be repeated in another form." (Reuter, 27th April, 1918.)

There certainly were a few exaggerated statements, gleaned from irresponsible people, in some of our papers, but the British official *communiqué* was fair and made no exaggerated claims.

It is true, however, that some of the claims, made in all good faith by senior officers in their official reports, did not survive investigation. For instance, reports I received of the fighting on the Mole were confusing and contradictory, which is not surprising, having regard to the conditions in which the action was fought. I was very anxious that my despatch should be absolutely and unquestionably accurate, so when Zeebrugge fell into our hands in October, 1918, I thoroughly examined the Mole myself, and later asked General Sir David Mercer (who was of course very interested in the exploits of his Marines) if he would care to accompany Major Godfrey, and all the surviving Naval and Marine officers who took part in the storming of the Mole, to examine the position and endeavour to ascertain exactly what happened on 23rd April. He accepted the invitation and associated himself with their report ; on the strength of which I amended my despatch of 19th May, 1918, before it was actually published in the *London Gazette* of 19th February, 1919.

Since then I have had access to German accounts, and except for an error regarding the guns at the end of the Mole, the report in my despatch—on which the foregoing account is based—is a bare statement of fact.

Captain Charles Schultz of the German Navy, has written a very interesting account : " The British Assault on the German Naval Bases Ostend and Zeebrugge. Prepared from the documents of the Naval Archives."\* Schultz, unlike his brother officers Von Hase and von Waldeyer-Hartz, is neither

\* This was published in the "United States Naval Institute Proceedings," July, 1929.

generous, fair nor very accurate; but he throws a very interesting light on the German point of view, and no British account of the action would be complete without reference to it.

Referring to our abortive effort on 11th-12th April, he says :

“ On this night, luck delivered into our hands a British motor-boat which had been launched outside of the entrance to the harbour and had run aground. The plans of operation found in this boat caused the commander of the Marine Corps, on April 12, 1918, to order the whole coast into constant state of readiness, into war watches which provided for certain and rapid calling of all batteries of the coast to battle stations. On April 14 the batteries east of Ostend were bombarded by enemy land batteries with several shots and, in addition, newly laid British buoys found in the outer approaches to the harbor indicated further enemy plans of assault. All of these indications as well as the unfavorable condition of the British land forces on the West Front, pointed to a major operation against the coast in the immediate future.

Thus, the night of April 22-23 drew nearer and several days of stormy weather followed by a falling wind, together with a favorable high water at 00.45, produced favorable conditions for an assault.

The assault and attempt to block the harbors did not come as a surprise, except as to the method of procedure, and it became a test of resolution between the attackers and the Mole defense forces of Zeebrugge, who conducted the defense so brilliantly.”

It is certainly deplorable that the young officer in command of *CMB33* should have carried information of such potential value to the enemy, into hostile waters, contrary to the explicit orders issued; but I think the enemy exaggerate the influence it had on subsequent events, and a fair comment on Schultz' statement, is that the enemy were surprisingly unsuccessful in their efforts to check us, if they really thought we were coming on 22nd-23rd April, and that we had any intention of attempting to block their harbours.

It was a very dark night on the 11th and a full moon on the 22nd, and I think Tomkinson's comment was probably correct, otherwise there was surely no excuse for the destroyers at Zeebrugge lying without steam and with their crews on shore. Moreover I was told by a German seaplane officer (who was stationed on the Mole at that time), who expressed the greatest admiration for our exploit, that the officers had a big party in the Hotel that night and knew nothing at all about it. When the firing started, they thought it was only an air raid, and told the Doctor—who was present—that he had better go back as there might be some casualties. However, the submarine explosion occurred before he got there, and he returned to say that the Mole was completely cut off.

Schultz states that: "Two hundred men of the Naval Air Station, placed on the Mole to protect the Aircraft Sheds, were unable to take any part in the fight, because, due to the greater distance of the landing point from the sheds, no British came into view. The difficult conditions of visibility caused by the fog, made it inadvisable for them to leave the vicinity of the Airplane sheds."

The absence of their officers may also have contributed to their inaction.

The attack on Ostend on 22nd-23rd was certainly a failure, but I do not think the enemy could really take any credit for that; even Schultz, who is not slow to seize on any adverse point, does not claim that they shifted the Stroom whistle buoy to mislead us; and we learnt, when we re-occupied Ostend in October, 1918, that the Germans had found a British mine in the channel near the buoy (no doubt one of the short-time mines laid by our C.M.B.s between the buoy and the entrance), and fearing that we would continue to mine that approach to Ostend, they adopted a new route well to the eastward, and shifted the buoy to mark it. So our effort to mislead the enemy recoiled upon us.

Captain Schultz has evidently read the British Official Despatch, for he makes statements as to our losses and other matters—when it suits him—which are obviously taken from it; on the other hand, he makes statements which he must know are untrue, such as the total strength of the assaulting force. He tells us that: "Actually, there were on the Mole 70 men of

the Harbour Company, 200 men of the Naval Air Station, 60 men of the Mole battery ; and the crews of the torpedo-boats lying in the harbour, were made available in very small parties for duty on the Mole. Opposed to these were the four [3] companies of the Royal Marines 750 men [580], and a bluejacket landing force of about 500 men [200], carried by the three ships ; a comparatively great difference, but our forces were entirely sufficient to handle the British." Schultz having previously declared that : " According to statements of prisoners captured, only 50 to 60 men were able to land on the Mole. The Mole Defence forces estimated this number even lower."

Schultz really cannot have it both ways !

No one who saw much of the War doubts that the Germans were a brave and tenacious enemy, but to belittle the attack and extol the defence, under the circumstances which existed, is about on a par with the claim that Scheer's flight to escape annihilation at the Battle of Jutland, was a great victory.

Owing to the position in which the *Vindictive* was berthed, the enemy were able to repulse the assault, delivered across an absolutely clear field of fire, without having to expose a man, which they wisely refrained from doing, and almost the only Germans seen by our people were the men from the destroyers, who were killed in, or escaping from their shelters, as the German casualty list bears out. It is not surprising that our casualties were out of all proportion to those of the defence, which according to Schultz, amounted to two men killed and two wounded in the Zeebrugge Mole battery, and six killed and twelve wounded among the destroyer and torpedo-boat crews.

Schultz states that : " Direct and indirect fire of the shore batteries against the *Vindictive*, during the landing attempt, was impossible, because of the dense fog which continued throughout the attack, enveloping everything, and because of the presence of our own men on the Mole."

But some of the shells which hit the *Vindictive* when she was alongside, could not have come from any but the shore guns to the westward of the Mole. His last remark is particularly interesting, and bears out my point—if the *Vindictive* had been at the end of the Mole, the guns of the destroyer, the anti-aircraft guns, and the machine-guns—which inflicted such heavy losses on the men who landed—could not have been

fired, owing to the proximity of their own people; a point which Liman von Sanders was well alive to, when he urged the Turks to get to grips with our troops, so that our ship's guns would be unable to fire at them (*see* Vol. I, page 332).

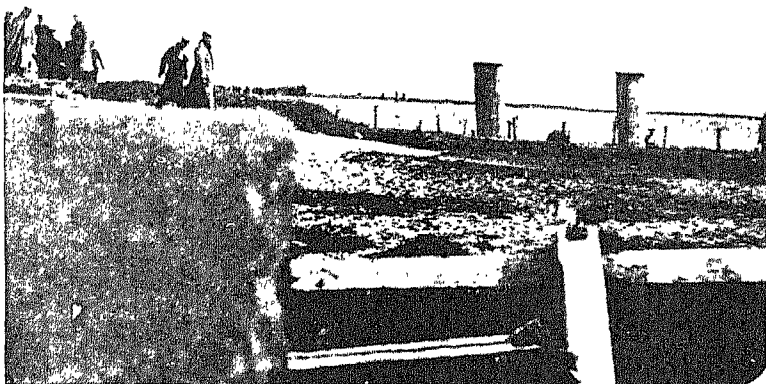
Regarding C3's effort, Schultz declares that: "Since there were no casualties in personnel resulting from the blowing up of the 'bridge,' this undertaking was useless, except in so far as concerned the damage done to the structure." He makes other statements in connection with the submarine's exploit, which are so obviously inaccurate, that one may perhaps also discount his statement as to the lack of casualties it caused.

Captain Schultz very properly gives great credit to the Mole extension battery and the determination of its commander. After sinking *ML110* and *ML424*, the light calibre guns of that small isolated battery were entirely responsible for inflicting such severe casualties on the *Vindictive's* personnel, that there were not sufficient men left to capture them from the position in which the *Vindictive* was berthed. After its brief engagement with the *Vindictive*, Schultz states that: "Since the Mole battery could fire on the *Vindictive* only during the short time of passage through their arc of fire, their successful efforts could be turned to other targets, namely the units attempting to block the Harbour."

The battery was, in fact, entirely responsible for preventing the *Thetis* from accomplishing her task, for it was not until after she had grounded in a sinking condition, that the Goeben and other shore batteries commenced to hit her.

Finally the loss of the *North Star*, when she was making good her escape, under cover of smoke, was due to two salvos fired by the Mole battery, which completely disabled her, within range of the shore batteries, which completed her destruction.

That battery deserves all the honours the Kaiser seems to have showered on everyone at Zeebrugge. The British prisoners (one Marine officer and 12 men) who were left behind on the Mole, were marched past the blockships in the morning, and were interviewed by the Kaiser—who happened to be staying in the neighbourhood, and who had come down to Zeebrugge to see the damage for himself. They were told that the ships had been sunk by German gunfire; and that is implied in a boastful telegram (published by Schultz) which the Kaiser sent to the General Staff the following morning.



KAISER LOOKING AT BLOCKSHIPS IN THE CANAL AT ZEEBRUGGE  
23RD APRIL, 1918



THE GOEBEN BATTERY  
4.8" Naval Guns, 1,200 Yards from Canal Entrance





I wonder how von Schröder, the German Admiral, who received the highest honour for repelling us, would have explained the presence of two ships rammed against the lock gates, or sunk in the lock; where they would have been, but for my accepting all the expert advice of the Belgians and directing them to sink themselves across the canal. A tormenting thought.

It took Commodore Young, R.N.R., and the Liverpool Salvage Company, with the most up-to-date appliances, more than a year to raise the blockships, and I do not believe the Germans could have cleared the Channel before the end of the War. Schultz declares that: "The position of the blocking vessels in the fairway of the canal did not suffice to completely block the fairway, no matter *how clearly various photographs seemed so deceptively to show*. (My italics.) Clear passage at high water was made even on the following day. At high water on 24th April, 1918, the vessels of the Second Flanders torpedo flotilla passed through the channel, which was restricted by two blocking ships, and on 25th April, 1918, UB15 also passed through."

These were all small shallow draught vessels, and week after week, our aerial photographs of Bruges clearly showed large destroyers lying in the Bruges basin and in the canal system, through which they were distributed, when aerial attacks became intense. Until the middle of June, large submarines could also be clearly distinguished in the open, so we were justified in supposing that the huge submarine shelters were occupied by as many submarines as they would hold.

Such photographs cannot lie, and others of the canal entrance clearly show that the Germans did not attempt to make a channel on the eastern side, where the *Iphigenia's* bow was grounded, but by removing two piers on the western shore, they eventually cut a channel under the sterns of the two blockships.

The photograph on page 298 which was found on a German prisoner captured by the Belgians (sent to me in August, 1918), clearly shows where the *Intrepid's* stern had cut its way into the silt, before she slipped back a moment or two before the sinking charges were blown. Had she remained there, it is doubtful whether destroyers and large submarines could ever have been got by.

When I visited Zeebrugge in October, 1918, the channel was almost dry at low water, and was marked by great iron girders, through which vessels could only be warped at high water.

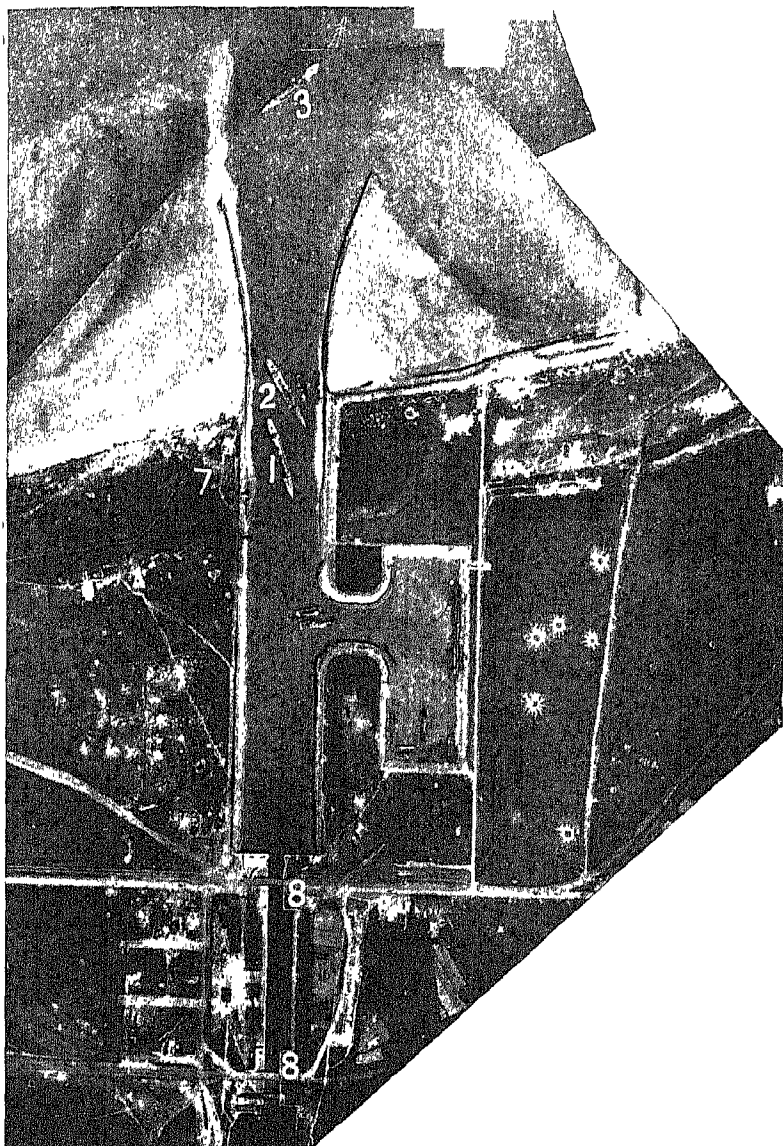
Captain Schultz' article is illustrated by a plan of Zeebrugge and the canal entrance. The *Vindictive* and destroyer *V169*, lying opposite her, are depicted, but not the three blockships lying at the entrance and in the canal—which of course did not fit in with his story. (See photo page 290.)

However, Schultz is not so maliciously inaccurate and ungenerous as Admiral Bacon, whose account, for instance, of the plan sent to him from the Admiralty, of the possibilities of blocking Zeebrugge and Ostend—which he ridicules with scathing contempt—is sheer fiction. He tells us that “the *Vindictive* was used instead of a monitor to bring in the troops. This was a mistake; the Admiralty offered her to me and on consideration I decided not to accept her.”

Actually the *Vindictive* was not even selected as a blockship until after Admiral Bacon had been superseded, or considered as a possible boarding ship until several weeks later.

To show the futility of attempting to block the canal, he illustrates his story of our raid with an imaginary drawing of a blockship, with a channel *dredged* across her bows; although he *knew* that such a channel would have to be cut through the solid stone, sloping sides of the canal. A possibility which was discounted after consultation with the Belgian engineers. He does not mention that we intended the first blockship to ram the lock gates.

In the “Dover Patrol, 1915-17” (published 1919) Admiral Bacon has a plan of the Mole, canal entrance and lock gates, which shows a bombarding ship and his boarding ship in the position he selected. (Which the *Vindictive* unfortunately took up in error.) In the “Concise History of the Dover Patrol” (published 1932) he has gone to the trouble and expense of substituting another plan of the same area, in which, besides his bombarding and boarding vessels, he shows the *Thetis* lying *outside* the canal, but omits the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* (which were actually lying in the canal), and he seems to have *mislaid them altogether*.



ZEEBRUGGE—BRUGES CANAL ENTRANCE

FROM BRITISH AEROPLANE AT 14,000 FT. 25TH MAY, 1918

- (1) *Intrepid*, (2) *Iphigenia*, (3) *Thetis*,  
(7) Position of piers which were removed to make a channel.  
(8) Lock gates to Bruges Canal.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### SECOND ATTEMPT TO BLOCK OSTEND

Visit King of the Belgians; Enemy reinforcements; *Vindictive* and *Sappho* sail for Ostend; *Sappho's* mishap; Commodore Lynes and Crutchley's reports; *Warwick* picks up *ML254*; *Warwick* mined; Return to Dover; Government announcement; Gallant deeds; Prepare for third attempt.

I HAD of course given Commodore Lynes command of the new attack on Ostend and provided him with all the vessels he required, and I had also sent Sandford to Dunkirk, to assist him in the staff work, and he was mainly responsible for the organisation of the smoke-screens, which provided for almost every possible contingency.

I was anxious, however, about Lynes' left flank, as I had received a report from the Naval Intelligence Department that a strong force of nine German destroyers had been sent to Zeebrugge from the Heligoland Bight. These were also seen by the aeroplanes, and appeared in the photographs alongside the Mole. I told Tomkinson to select three good destroyers to accompany me in the *Warwick*, as I meant to prevent the Zeebrugge destroyers from interfering with the operation. I had always considered that a unit of four destroyers, working in close company, was ideal for night work, and I only hoped that the German destroyers would come out and give us an opportunity of proving it.

The day after our Zeebrugge raid, I received a most charming letter from the King of the Belgians, and on the 8th May, he telegraphed to me, to ask me to lunch at La Panne, as he wanted to consult me about something. As the Deputy Chief of Staff (Rear-Admiral Sydney Fremantle) had come down to see me at Dover that day, I took him with me in the *Warwick* to Dunkirk, where we picked up Commodore Lynes, who had also been invited, and motored out to La Panne.

During lunch there was a good deal of talk about wild birds—Lynes' chief interest in life—and among other things we discussed was the flighting of wild geese, which passed regularly

over La Panne ; the Queen thought that they came from England to the flooded areas round the Yser.

The Queen was very anxious to know when I meant to attack the coast again, as she had missed the last attack, and the King had told her of the wonderful display of searchlights, star-shells and gunfire.

I said that we always had to wait for certain conditions of weather and tide, and that if we wished to close the coastal batteries, a sea breeze was necessary to blow the smoke ahead of us. The Queen begged me to allow her to watch one of our bombardments from a monitor, but I said : " Suppose anything happened to you, it would be awful for me, and I might not be killed." She said : " But I could stand quite close to you, and then if anything happened, we would both be killed and it would be all right." The Queen then asked me to let her know next time we started, in order that she might be on the look-out, and said I could send her some cryptic message. I laughed and said, for instance : " The wild geese fly to-night." She said that would be splendid. Of course it was all chaff, though I believe she meant it seriously. She never missed an opportunity of going into the front-line trenches.

After lunch, the King took me out on to the sand dunes opposite the villa, and very shyly gave me the star of a Grand Officer of the Order of Leopold, and said very nice things about our exploit. We all went for a walk afterwards along the shore, and I noticed that the wind had shifted and there was now a gentle breeze blowing in from seaward.

It was the first possible day of the new period, really a day too early, but one could not afford to miss a chance, so I had ordered the ships to stand by, and the *Vindictive* and *Sappho* were lying with banked fires at Dover. I told Lynes that we must get back at once, and we motored full speed to Dunkirk, where I sent off the warning signal, and returned with all dispatch in the *Warwick* to Dover. When saying good-bye to the Queen I said : " The wild geese will fly to-night, Mam," and she wished me the best of good luck.

Before leaving Dunkirk I heard that during the afternoon, the Belgian Coast Patrol had sighted, and the monitors had fired at, nine German destroyers, which retired. This confirmed

the previous reports, and it seemed that we might have something to do during the night.

The *Vindictive* and *Sappho* were coming out of Dover harbour, as the *Warwick* approached, so I stopped them, and ran alongside the *Sappho* to wish Hardy and his ship's company good luck, and then went on board the *Vindictive*. Godsall had been very anxious during the preparation of the *Vindictive*, he was so afraid that he might never get an opportunity of wiping out the failure of the *Sirius*. He now looked serene and happy, as if he had not a care or anxiety. I shook hands and wished him the best of luck, but I felt quite sure—I don't know why—and I am certain he felt, too, that we should not meet again in this world.

I spoke to Victor Crutchley and Alleyne, and was very surprised to see Maclachlan, who had been keeping in the background. I asked him what he was doing there, and he replied: "Sir, I found my gear had been put on board, so I thought I ought to go with it." He was a tall good-looking boy with a very cheery laugh, and I had not the heart to turn him out, although I wished I had afterwards.

There was no need for the *Warwick* to leave for some time, so I went ashore and dined with my wife, who told me that Godsall and Crutchley had brought the *Vindictive's* bell up to Fleet House and given it to her, as they said they did not see why the Germans should have it. She told me that when Godsall said good-bye to her, she felt as I had, that he knew he was not coming back, and that she could not bear it; but that she had not felt anything of the sort about Victor Crutchley.

After dinner, we walked down to the pier, and I embarked in the *Warwick* and hoisted my silk flag. Tomkinson, and my Staff, which this time included Osborne, and also the Chaplain Jackson—who had begged to come—accompanied me, and we sailed with the *Whirlwind*, *Velox* and *Trident*, for a position between Zeebrugge and Ostend, where we arrived some time before the proceedings were due to commence.

We had studied all the lessons of the previous attack, and I thought the new orders provided a counter for almost every possible misfortune.

Of course I realised that it was going to be a pretty desperate business to get the crews of the blockships away, but short of mining the approach to Ostend, I did not think the enemy



could stop the ships getting in, round about high water. All our small craft would be able to pass well above a minefield, and if the *Vindictive* or *Sappho* struck a mine, there would be plenty of them about to save their crews.

Arrangements had been made to keep the buoys off Ostend under aerial observation, and our aircraft had fixed the new position of the Stroom Bank Buoy on the 24th April. For some days before the operation, no observations were possible, owing to rain, mist and cloud ; but during the afternoon of the 9th May, an air reconnaissance reported that all the buoys off Ostend had been removed. However, a calcium light buoy was accurately laid after dark, to give a departure point for the blockships and smoke-screening vessels.

Commodore Lynes reported that the *Vindictive* and *Sappho* disembarked their surplus crews at Dunkirk, and proceeded with their escorts at the programme time ; but shortly after the *Sappho* left Dunkirk, she had a boiler accident, which reduced her speed to such an extent, that she could not possibly arrive at Ostend in time to take part in the attack.

Lynes signalled to me by wireless from Dunkirk, to let me know what had happened, and to tell me that he intended to carry out the operation without her. I felt that he was right, as the weather conditions were excellent, and we might not get another favourable opportunity. However, I did not reply, as I did not wish to give away the *Warwick's* position to the enemy's directional wireless.

It was arranged that this time there should be no preliminary air raid or bombardment, until our forces were discovered ; but at 1.35 a.m. the enemy searchlights commenced to search the approaches, and as the C.M.B.s had arrived and were running their smoke-screens, Lynes considered that the noise of their engines must have reached the shore, so he made the pre-arranged signal a few minutes later to open fire, which was immediately obeyed by the monitors, siege guns and air squadrons.

Up till about 1.50 a.m., the conditions had been almost perfect, calm sea, wind N. by W. and a clear sky, and everything appeared to be going well. Then without any warning, the inshore craft were enveloped in a thick, wet sea fog. Fortunately this did not extend as far as the monitors to the westward, who

were able to continue their bombardment, as were the aircraft, the fog being sufficiently low for them to work between it and a heavy bank of clouds, which had blown in from seaward.

At 2 a.m.—the *Vindictive's* programme time to arrive at the piers—heavy firing was heard at the entrance to Ostend.

The following account is taken from Lieutenant Crutchley's report of the *Vindictive's* proceedings :

“On arrival at position “P,” course was altered for the Stroom Bank Buoy. The boat marking the buoy was seen and left close on the port hand; the buoy was not seen. Speed was reduced to 12 knots on passing the buoy.

At this time the smoke-screen was excellent. There was a lane between the eastern and western sections, and the only fire experienced was shrapnel, which I considered was fired at a venture, and did no harm. We ran on for thirteen minutes from the Stroom Bank Buoy, and then, as the entrance was not sighted, altered course to the westward parallel to the shore, and reduced to 60 revolutions (nine knots). As we still failed to see the entrance, we altered course 16 points to starboard, and returned along the shore to the eastward. We again failed to find the entrance, and so altered course 16 points to starboard. All this time owing to fog and smoke, the visibility was not more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cables [300 yards]. This time the entrance was sighted about one cable on the port beam, and at the same time the ship came under a very heavy fire from shore batteries of all descriptions.

On sighting the entrance, in accordance with previous orders, I passed the order, ‘preparatory abandon ship’ to the engine-room. As soon as the entrance was sighted the ship was handled from the conning tower. Commander Godsall immediately turned up for the entrance and ordered smoke to be lighted. At about this time communication with the after control failed. Just after the entrance was passed, Commander Godsall went outside the conning tower and gave the order hard-a-starboard from outside.

Immediately after this a heavy shell burst either on the conning tower or very close to it; Lieutenant Alleyne

was knocked out, and Commander Godsall was not seen again, and all the occupants of the conning tower were badly shaken. I then ordered the port telegraph to full speed astern, to try to swing the ship across the channel. She grounded forward on the eastern pier when at an angle of about three points to the pier. As the ship stopped swinging, and at the time I considered that no more could be done, I ordered the ship to be abandoned.

When the engine-room had been abandoned, Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Bury blew the ship up by firing the main charges and after-auxiliary charges, and I endeavoured to fire the forward auxiliary charges. There was a considerable shock when the first set of charges were fired. I am not positive that the forward auxiliary charges fired, as I could not distinguish the shock from other disturbances.

When I got on board *ML254* I found that the First Lieutenant had been killed by a shell bursting, also one deckhand. The Captain, Lieutenant Geoffrey H. Drummond, R.N.V.R., and the coxswain had been wounded. We went out of the harbour stern first followed the whole way by machine-gun fire. On finally going ahead the forecastle flooded, and the boat was very much down by the bows. The pump and buckets were got under way and all spare hands placed right aft. However, the water was gaining, and 'S.O.S.' was made by flashing lamp continually to seaward. The courses steered from Ostend were west for 15 minutes, and then west by north until picked up by *Warwick*.

I cannot speak too highly of the bravery of the M.L.s coming alongside inside Ostend; they were under a continuous and heavy fire. *ML254* rescued two officers and 37 men.

The question of recommendations is a very difficult one. Every man, without exception, behaved splendidly."

Godsall had of course intended to put the *Vindictive's* helm hard-a-port, when she reached the narrowest part of the channel, but it would appear that when the *Vindictive* eventually found the entrance, she was too close to the eastern pier to use port helm, without risk of grounding broadside on. This would

account for Commander Godsal's order "hard-a-starboard" a few seconds before he was killed. The *Vindictive* was thus committed to starboard helm, when the command devolved on Lieutenant Crutchley, who very promptly put the port telegraph to full speed astern. Unfortunately the port propeller, which was very severely damaged against Zeebrugge Mole, was of little value. Due to this, and also to the fact that the tide was setting strongly against her starboard side, the ship's stern did not swing across the channel as desired, with the result, that she grounded at an angle of about 25 degrees to the eastern pier, leaving a considerable channel between her stern and the western pier.

While all this was going on, I was having a hateful time, the roar of guns was intense, rockets, star-shells, and "flaming onions" lit up the sky, there was no sign of the German destroyers from Zeebrugge, and there was nothing we could do to help. When the dripping wet fog enveloped us, it filled me with anxiety, for I feared that the *Vindictive* might not be able to find the entrance. It was so dense, that bright stern lights had to be used by my destroyers to enable them to keep station, and these were only visible for a few yards. Off Zeebrugge there had been so much to occupy my attention, now I could only wait and hope for the best.

At 2.45 a.m.—15 minutes after the programme time for the withdrawal of the motor craft—the *Warwick* and her consorts proceeded slowly to the westward, parallel to the coast. I had a strong feeling that after that terrific cannonade, there might well be some derelicts adrift, and I directed Campbell to stand in as close as possible towards Ostend, while making for the channel to the westward. It was still pretty foggy, but the visibility was now about five cables (1,000 yards), and we were about 3,000 yards from Ostend, when we sighted to shoreward of us, a flashing light repeating S.O.S. signals; so we stood towards it and found *ML254* lying stopped with her forecastle almost awash, crowded with people, her Captain, Lieutenant Geoffrey Drummond, very badly wounded, was huddled up near the wheel, his second in command—Lieutenant Gordon Ross—and other men, had been killed, and most of her small crew and many of the *Vindictive's*, including the gallant Bury,

were lying wounded. Crutchley and some of the unwounded were in the forepart of the vessel, up to their waists in water, baling hard and trying to keep the water under control, but she could not have lasted much longer.

We ran alongside and started removing the wounded, which took half an hour to do, owing to the serious condition of some of them, and dawn was breaking before the boat was cleared. We were within very close range of the coastal batteries, and if the mist had lifted, the situation would not have been a pleasant one.

When everyone was clear, I told the Torpedo Lieutenant on my Staff to put an explosive charge into the M.L., as she was too badly damaged to tow, but she appeared to have taken a new lease of life when relieved of her burden, and I did not wish to run any risk of her falling into the enemy's hands. We were just going to shove her off, when Trumble, the First Lieutenant of the *Warwick*, standing beside Tomkinson and me, leant over and caught hold of the muzzle of a Lewis gun, which was mounted on her side, saying we had better save this. I don't know how it happened, but the gun went off and the bullet hit him in the forehead, and he dropped dead beside us.

By this time the tide had fallen so low, that it was inexpedient to return by the route inside the shoals, by which the approach had been made, and I was very anxious to get away to seaward as soon as possible, out of range of the enemy's guns before the mist lifted ; so a course was steered for a gap in the net defence, by the deep draught route from Ostend, and I withdrew the division at 25 knots.

It would seem that the enemy had mined this route in anticipation of an attack. At 4.0 a.m. the *Warwick* struck a mine aft, and heeled over about 30 degrees to port, and from the bridge it looked as if she was going down stern first with a heavy list ; but thanks to the promptness of Engineer Lieut.-Commander R. Rampling, who trimmed the ship by adjusting the oil fuel, she righted herself, and eventually came to rest on an even keel with her stern almost awash. Fortunately her after engine-room bulkhead held, until it was shored up, though her back was broken about 70 feet from the stern, and the after part of the ship, which was wrecked, was only kept in place by the mine rails (she had been fitted as a minelayer). The after

super-imposed gun was thrown into the air and tilted over the side of the superstructure, the men standing by having very narrow escapes. Down below, the magazines and store rooms were flooded, and in the wardroom and cabins, the water was almost up to the upper deck in a few moments. Fortunately no one was in the Captain's cabin. Some of the people below had miraculous escapes, including Drummond, who was lying in the wardroom with a smashed thigh. Osborne was there talking to him, and he managed to get him up an ammunition manhole, as they were cut off from the companion hatch. A terrier belonging to the wardroom, swam about for a long time before it was discovered and saved.

Most of the wounded were under the forecastle, and when the mine exploded a tired voice said: "O my God, in the ditch after all!" and another answered: "That's what comes of shipping a parson, the Admiral ought to have known better."

Crutchley was sitting with me in the charthouse, telling me what had happened in the *Vindictive*. He had just taken off his lifebelt, which was covered with blood, as he had been carrying the wounded from the *Vindictive* to the launch. When the crash came I said: "Victor, you had better put it on again," which he did, and then left me. A little later looking over the fore end of the bridge, I saw him on the forecastle hauling up the cable and helping with the preparations for towing. I was then amused to see the faithful Woolley and Brady appear—evidently determined to see that I did not drown.

I gave directions for the *Velox* to be lashed alongside, the *Whirlwind* to take the *Warwick* in tow, and the *Trident* to look out to the eastward, to give warning if the enemy destroyers were sighted coming from Zeebrugge. I gave orders that if they appeared, the *Warwick* was to be slipped at once, and the other three vessels were to engage them. As the *Warwick* was in considerable danger of sinking, all the rescued *Vindictive's* crew—except Crutchley, who thought he might be useful to act as First Lieutenant—were transferred to the *Velox*, and I sent Jackson, too, to help look after the wounded. He said as he left: "Is this what you call a quiet night, you told me we should probably only be spectators in the offing."

Progress was very slow, and as the effective range of the heavy Ostend guns was from 20,000 to 40,000 yards, it was a

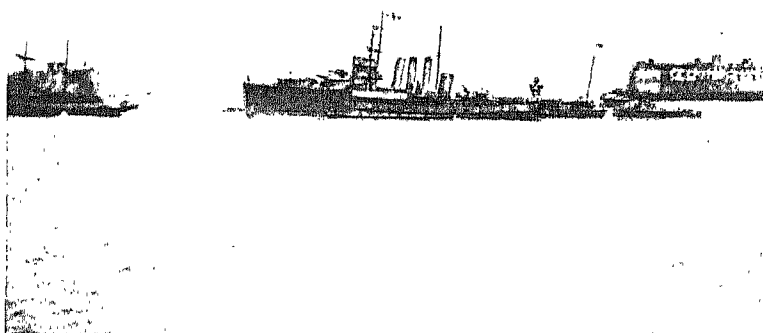
long time before we were out of their range. A much more unpleasant prospect, however, would have been the advent of the nine destroyers, which I had been hoping to meet in darkness, but which would have overwhelmed us in daylight.

By 7 a.m. we were outside a really dangerous range, and as the mist was lifting, I decided to risk the enemy's directional wireless and call up all the assistance available. As all our signal books and ciphers had been destroyed—as usual when we went into enemy waters—the signal had to be made *en clair*; no ships were mentioned, but their Captains were named, and told to concentrate at a given bearing and distance from “Z” buoy (one of the temporary buoys laid down that night for the operations). As we approached the rendezvous it was a great relief to see a formidable array of monitors and destroyers which had come out to meet us, and know that the enemy had missed their great opportunity of destroying us.

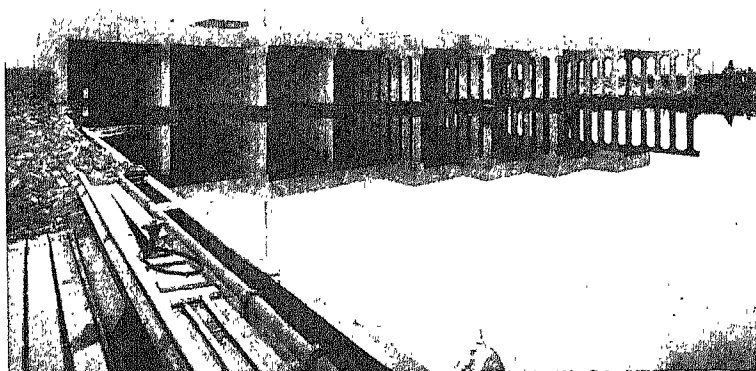
I then sent the *Velox* back to Dover with the wounded. I wished afterwards that I had gone in her, but I did not like to leave my wounded *Warwick*. At first we made fairly good progress in tow of the *Whirlwind*, with another destroyer lashed alongside, but the *Warwick* had made so much water, that I thought it advisable to get the salvage tugs with pumps alongside, in case of other bulkheads going. Captain Irons, of Dover, who had a great reputation in the War for salvage work, came out with his salvage vessels, and took charge of us, and the remainder of the passage was very slow and tedious. As we passed under the cliffs of the South Foreland, I saw my children waving there. It was my youngest daughter's birthday and my wife and I had promised to go to her birthday tea-party, but I found my wife waiting for me on the pier when we arrived at Dover at 4.30 p.m. She had been told of the mine explosion in the morning, and had been waiting anxiously all day for our return, as she knew I had been expecting to meet the nine German destroyers.

I found about 40 reporters outside my office waiting to interview me. I told them briefly what had occurred, on their giving me their word of honour that they would not mention that the *Warwick* had been blown up, or that I had given them an interview, and I need hardly say they loyally kept their word.

On arriving at my office, I found that, on the strength of the



USS ARWICK BEING TOWED BACK TO DOVER  
10TH MAY, 1918



SUBMARINE SHELTER AT BRUGES





information I had received from Crutchley, which I had passed to Lynes, when the vessels acting under his orders came to my assistance ; he forwarded a report to my office at Dover, which Boyle passed to the Admiralty before my arrival. In this it was stated that the *Vindictive* had entered the Channel at Ostend, "slew about 40 degrees athwart and sunk herself." Where-upon the following official *communiqué* was issued :

"The operation designed to close the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge was successfully completed last night, when the obsolete cruiser H.M.S. *Vindictive* was sunk between the piers and across the entrance of Ostend Harbour.

Since the attack on Zeebrugge on April 23rd, *Vindictive* had been filled with concrete and fitted as a blockship for this purpose.

Our light forces have returned to their bases, with the loss of one motor launch, which had been damaged and was sunk by the orders of the Vice-Admiral, to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy. Our casualties were light."

I was very annoyed about this, as the operation was *not* "successfully completed," and the report forwarded by Boyle gave no justification for this claim.

In this second attempt, officers who had distinguished themselves in the last, and others who had not had the opportunity of doing so, had all vied with one another to obtain the most exposed positions and the most dangerous tasks.

Welman led his C.M.B.s and during the action encountered an enemy torpedo-boat, which switched on her searchlights and opened fire on him. His only weapons were two Lewis guns, but he at once closed and attacked her to such good effect, that he drove her away, and left the channel clear for the approach of the *Vindictive*.

Lieutenant the Hon. Cecil Spencer in a C.M.B. escorted the *Vindictive* close inshore, and laid and lit the million candle power flare between the piers, which eventually enabled the *Vindictive* to find her way in. This action, of course, drew a storm of fire, and his C.M.B. was lucky to escape.

Lieutenant Russell McBean in another C.M.B. also escorted the *Vindictive* to the entrance, and assisted with guiding lights; he then fired torpedoes at the piers, and finally engaged the machine-guns there with his own machine-guns at point-blank range, with apparently good effect. He was wounded and his Chief Mechanic killed, and the boat was brought out by Sub-Lieutenant George R. Shaw, R.N.R.

Lieutenant Cuthbert Bowlby, who was also supposed to torpedo the piers, fired his torpedo, but the water being shallow, it hit the bottom and exploded almost under the boat, damaging her severely. She commenced to sink, but they managed to stop the leak and repaired the engines sufficiently to get out to sea, where they were picked up and towed home.

Captain Hamilton Benn again led the M.L.s and set a fine example. There were two rescue M.L.s with volunteer crews, and two more in reserve, in case the selected ones broke down; and their work was simply magnificent.

*ML254* was following the *Vindictive* into Ostend, when off the piers a shell burst on board, killing Lieutenant Gordon Ross and a deckhand, wounding the coxswain and severely wounding Lieutenant Geoffrey Drummond in three places. Notwithstanding his wounds, he remained on the bridge, navigated his vessel, which was already seriously damaged by shell fire, into Ostend Harbour, and took off two officers and 38 men, some of whom were killed and many wounded while embarking. When told that there was no one else left alive on board, he backed his vessel clear of the piers, before sinking exhausted from his wounds.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Roland Bourke was anxiously waiting for his turn, and when following the *Vindictive* in, he engaged the enemy machine-guns on both piers with his Lewis guns. After *ML254* had backed out, Bourke laid *ML276* alongside to make further search. Finding no one, he was withdrawing, but hearing cries in the water, he returned and after prolonged search found Alleyne and two ratings, all badly wounded, clinging to a capsized skiff, and rescued them. During all this time the M.L. was under a heavy fire at close range, being hit in 55 places, once by a six-inch shell. Two of her small crew were killed and others wounded. The vessel was very seriously damaged and speed greatly reduced, but Bourke managed to bring her

out and carry on until he fell in with a monitor, which took him in tow to Dunkirk. *ML276* must have passed fairly near *ML254* in the mist, and must have got well away before my division arrived on the scene.

I grieved for the loss of my gallant "Centurion" Godsall. He had left the shelter of the *Vindictive's* conning tower for the forecastle, in order to get a better view for manœuvring her into the required position, and was almost immediately killed by a shell which burst on the conning tower, and also severely wounded and stunned Alleyne, who was standing beside P.O. Reed who was steering inside the conning tower.

When the ship was abandoned Reed carried Alleyne to the gangway and lowered him over the side into a skiff.

Crutchley had displayed great courage. Having succeeded to the command of the *Vindictive*, and made every endeavour by manœuvring his engines to place the ship in an effective position, he did not leave her until he had made a thorough search with an electric torch for survivors, under a very heavy fire. When Drummond collapsed from his wounds, Crutchley took command of the M.L. and by good seamanship and indomitable energy, managed to keep her afloat, until she was picked up by the *Warwick*.

Engineer-Commander Bury was very severely wounded. He remained in the engine-room until the last possible moment, and when everyone was clear, he blew the bottom out of the ship, by firing the main and auxiliary after charges. Three of his gallant E.R.A.s were saved, the fourth was missing, but we were glad to hear later that he had been picked up swimming by the Germans.

I was very sorry for Lynes, who had conducted both Ostend operations, which had failed through no fault of his; and on each occasion, he had led the inner division of destroyers in the *Faulknor*.

Commodore Lynes made a general signal that afternoon to the vessels acting under his command, telling them that: "The *Vindictive* has been definitely located by air reconnaissance well inside the harbour, and although her angle is not enough to entirely block the harbour, she will hamper the enemy movements. Moreover she provides a constant insult to him"

The Government announcement brought another flood of congratulations, including one from the War Cabinet: "The country owes you, and the officers and men under your orders, its warmest thanks for the successful efforts you have made to deal with the submarine menace at its source. The blocking of Ostend last night, put the finishing touch to the gallant achievement of Zeebrugge and we send you our sincere congratulations."

The Official Historian tells us that the War Cabinet "Took the view that whatever the results and consequences of the expedition might be, those who had penetrated the terrible system of fortifications that guarded Ostend, with such indifference to danger and suffering, had deserved well of the United Kingdom."\*

Sir Douglas Haig's message said: "The whole Army has heard with enthusiasm the good news of your action at Ostend." The Lord Mayor told us that: "The citizens of London have been filled with enthusiastic admiration of the brilliant exploits of the officers and men of the Royal Navy under your command."

This was all very gratifying, and the officers and men who helped to place the *Vindictive* in the channel at Ostend deserved it all, but unfortunately she did not block the channel, through no fault of theirs.

The Government was given an opportunity of putting the matter right, in answer to a question in Parliament a few days later. However, the original *communiqué* was declared to be correct, so I respectfully submitted to the Admiralty by telegram, that it must be inferred that the statements were based on my report. I had never made any report which could be expanded to the terms of the *communiqué* of the 10th May, or suggested that the operation was successful. On the contrary, I had definitely stated that the Commanding Officer of the *Vindictive* considered that there must be a considerable channel on the west side.

My protest was not even acknowledged, so I thought the only thing to do was to justify the Admiralty's claim, by trying once again to block Ostend, and I set to work at once to make a new plan to complete the business.

\* "Naval Operations," Vol. V, page 274.

The German official accounts of our second attack on Ostend were as follows :

“May 10th, 1918.

At 3 o'clock this morning, British Naval forces, after a violent bombardment, again made a blocking attack on Ostend. Several enemy ships which, under the protection of artificial fog, tried to force their way into the harbour, were driven off by the excellently directed fire of our coastal batteries.

An old cruiser, entirely battered to pieces, lies aground before the harbour, outside the navigational channel. The entrance into the harbour is quite free. Only dead were found on board the stranded vessel. Two survivors had sprung overboard and were captured.

According to information so far received, at least two enemy motor-boats were shot away and one monitor badly damaged. The blockading attempt has therefore been completely foiled. Once again the enemy sacrificed human lives and vessels in vain.”

“May 11th, 1918.

The second attempt by the English found our naval forces as well prepared as on the first occasion. The reasons why this time the attack was made only on Ostend are not at present apparent. It is true that a heavy artificial fog was developed by the English off Zeebrugge [natural sea fog] simultaneously with the attack on Ostend, but this was obviously in order to distract our attention.

On Friday at 2.45 a.m. the enemy opened fire from the sea on our batteries at Ostend, and a few minutes later a heavy artificial fog was produced. When two minutes after 3 o'clock two cruisers were sighted in the fog east of Ostend our batteries immediately opened a well-aimed fire, after a curtain fire had already been placed before the entrance. One cruiser turned westwards, the other to the north. The latter was repeatedly sighted in the fog and was each time bombarded. A monitor, which was lying off the coast without firing, and which had apparently been put out of action, was perceived at 4.13, but

was immediately completely enveloped in smoke by the enemy.”\*

It is true that the official account of the second attack on Ostend was an exaggeration, which we deplored, nevertheless, I think the explanation given by the Official Naval Historian of the War Cabinet’s message to me, reflected the opinion of Great Britain and her Allies. It certainly voiced the opinion of the United States newspapers. The King of the Belgians actually flew over Ostend in a British aeroplane on the afternoon of the 10th May, and knowing that our attempts had been a failure, sent a telegram of warm congratulations on behalf of the Queen and himself. I think the idea that we had sunk the *Vindictive* in a heavily fortified enemy harbour, and his knowledge of the devoted heroism called for by such a feat, appealed to his warrior spirit—and also to the Queen, who had no idea of what we were going to do, when we left them at La Panne.

As I was given an absolutely free hand, not only to make my own plans for the blocking of Zeebrugge and Ostend, but to select all the people who carried them out, whatever errors of judgment or faults may have been made, the responsibility was mine. One thing, however, stands out for all time—the seamen of the Royal Navy, R.N.R., R.N.V.R. and the Royal Marines, followed their young officers, who led them so bravely, with a heroic contempt of death which brought much honour to His Majesty’s Sea Services.

\* No doubt the *Warwick* with *ML254* alongside. German time one hour later than British.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### HONOURS AND DECORATIONS

Preparations for third attempt to block Ostend; Admiralty decision; Aerial photographs; Honours and Decorations; Air raids and counter raids; Difficulties over Decorations; Visit to Admiralty; Submarines destroyed; Visits to France and Flanders; The King visits Dunkirk; Successful minelaying.

I DISCUSSED the plans for a third attempt to block Ostend with Admiral Wemyss, and forwarded the following memorandum, to be considered by the Admiralty :

20/5/18.

1. The original object in blocking Ostend simultaneously with Zeebrugge was to prevent Destroyers or Submarines proceeding to or from Bruges by canal.

2. It has been clearly established by aircraft reconnaissance that the Bruges-Ostend canal has not been used by these craft since the blocking of Zeebrugge. Photographs taken on 19th May definitely prove, that the large number of Torpedo craft and submarines which were at Bruges on 23rd April are still immobilized there. It can therefore be presumed that the Bruges-Ostend canal cannot be used for clearing Bruges of these craft.

3. The main reason for blocking Ostend has thus vanished. It is true that all the docks which were at Ostend except one have been removed to Bruges, where they are likely to remain, but Ostend is now used by destroyers and submarines (from seaward), and it therefore appears to be most desirable that the blocking of Ostend should be completed.

3. Owing to the recent attempt, it is very likely that the enemy will lay, or has already laid, mines, and therefore it will be necessary for the blockships to be fitted with some form of protection.

5. The "SAPPHO" is still ready—but in addition at least one, preferably two, other ships should be prepared, and I would submit the "SWIFTSURE" be detailed. I understand she is only drawing 23ft. 5in. now, and no doubt by removing her main armament, masts, etc., could easily be got up to the necessary draught.



6. We should be prepared to carry out the operation between the 6th and 10th of June, inclusive.

ROGER KEYES.

The Admiralty approved, and once again Chatham Dockyard set to work to make the necessary preparations. The dockyard officials and workmen had of course been intensely interested in the exploits of the strange ships which they had been fitting out, and they did everything they possibly could to help us to get the vessels ready by the required date.

The *Swiftsure*, which was to lead, was sufficiently armoured to stand up to six-inch gunfire, the highest calibre actually mounted at the entrance to Ostend, and we hoped to screen her by smoke from the heavier batteries on the coast. Three well armoured, alternative control stations, were fitted with all the necessary communications, one in the conning tower, and one either side in the foremost six-inch gun casemates. An officer was to be in each, ready to take over command, in succession, if necessary.

I felt certain that the enemy would now mine the approaches to Ostend, possibly leaving some secret channel, or more likely laying the mines at a depth, over which their small craft could pass at high water; the *Swiftsure* was therefore provided with the mine-cutting device fitted to merchantmen. I did not like to ask for the latest paravanes, as I could not guarantee that they would be destroyed before the enemy could salve them, though Sandford, who always thought of everything, designed a means of doing so, which, bar accidents, would have been effective.

Since the operation was never carried out, there is no need to go into the details of the plan; but it included the use of P-boats, with the most up-to-date means of sweeping, to precede the blockships to the entrance, and embodied all the experience we had gained in our previous attempts. The volunteer crews were reduced to the minimum, and like their predecessors were quite ready to die in the attempt.

I selected Commander A. B. Cunningham of the *Termagant* to command the *Swiftsure*. He had been in the *Scorpion* off Gallipoli, and had worked with my brother Adrian on the left flank off Helles throughout the Campaign (*see* Vol. I).

As Hardy had already left the *Sappho*, and had been so unlucky twice, I did not invite him to come back, but gave the command

to Newbold of *C1*, at Sandford's urgent request and on his strong recommendation.

The *Swiftsure* and *Sappho* had actually been out, tried all their special devices, cut through a dummy minefield, practised the rapid transfer of command, and were only waiting for the day ; when Admiral Wemyss told me that the Naval Intelligence Department was absolutely convinced, that the Bruges-Ostend canal could only be used by small submarines and torpedo-boats ; and as these could also now get by the blockships at Zeebrugge at high water, there seemed to be no object in blocking Ostend ; for we could now drop heavy shells into Ostend harbour whenever we wished, and the enemy made practically no use of it in consequence ; the Board therefore had decided not to permit me to again attempt to block it. I hated giving it up, but at the same time really felt relieved, as I did not want to risk any more of my gallant people, in an unnecessary and exceedingly dangerous undertaking, although they were all terribly disappointed. However, I promised Cunningham—who went back to the *Termagant*—that I would not forget him next time there was any work to be done. Newbold went back to the Submarine Service. Lynes joined the Grand Fleet and was succeeded by Commodore F. Larken.

Before the end of May, a sound-ranging system, installed under the directions of Captain Douglas, with stations at St. Margaret's and Lowestoft, enabled us to determine positions at sea with absolute accuracy. For instance, a bombarding ship dropped a small explosive charge, and within a few minutes, St. Margaret's station reported the position within a few yards.

There is nothing of greater value to a leader in war, than the authority to reward the distinguished services of those under his command promptly, and generously, and I forwarded my list of recommendations to the Admiralty with a covering letter, pointing out that a great many small units were engaged, with great opportunities for showing gallantry and initiative, and that of the 137 vessels engaged, 76 were M.L.s and C.M.B.s, carrying approximately 175 officers and 400 men, and therefore the proportion of officers to men engaged was very high. I hoped for the best, as my covering letter was designed to meet all the opposition and difficulties Admiral de Robeck had encountered, when sending in his recommendations for Gallipoli.

A few days after the second attack on Ostend, the King of the Belgians invited me to come to La Panne, and he gave me his Croix de Guerre ; and later he sent me a number of decorations and Croix de Guerre, for officers and men I was to nominate.

The Chief of the French Naval Staff—Admiral de Bon—a friend of Gallipoli days, wrote me a very nice letter, and sent me the insignia of a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, and a Croix de Guerre, with a wonderfully worded “ citation ; ” and 14 more to be given to those I selected, who had most distinguished themselves, asking me to tell him what each individual had done, in order that they might write the “ citation.” This was done, and my bald statements were translated into eloquent French.

I did not tell the Admiralty at the time, about these awards, until it was too late for them to interfere, as I was afraid that they might wish to give them instead of British decorations, as they had done in the case of some officers, Admiral de Robeck had recommended for distinguished and gallant services in Gallipoli ; which I thought a most improper proceeding.

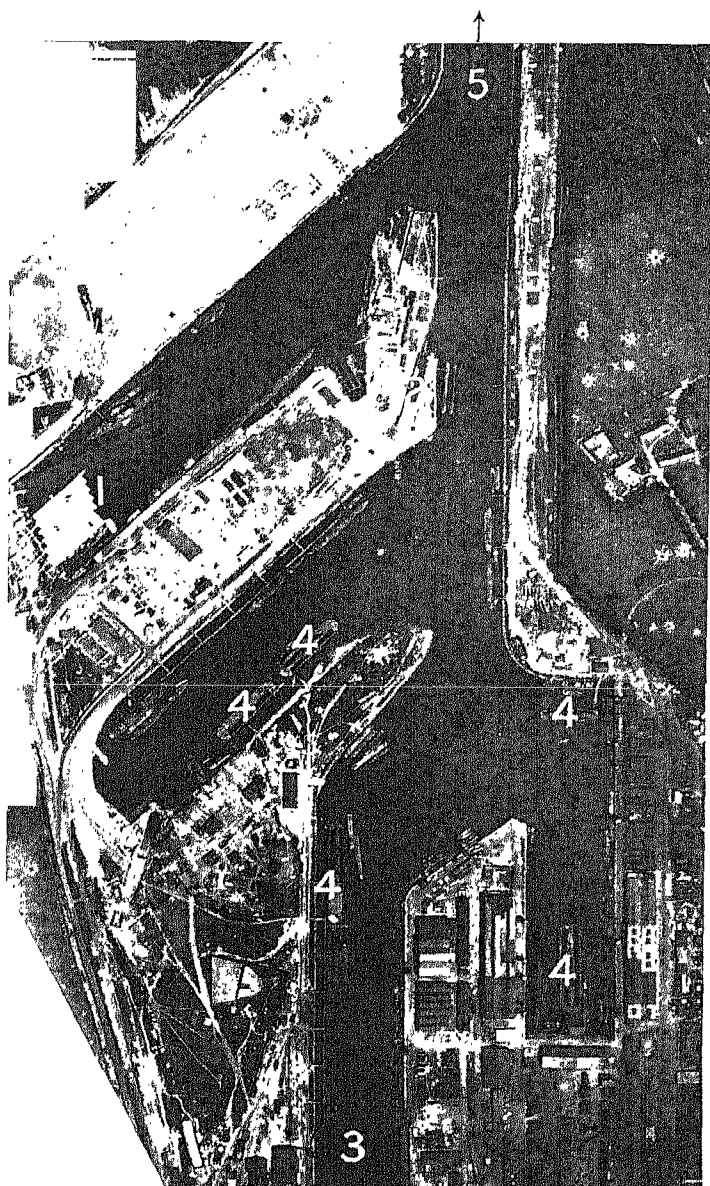
The reports which were sent to me every few days, by the experts who examined the aerial photographs of Bruges, continued to be very satisfactory. On the 16th May for instance, there were still shut up in Bruges, 12 T.B.D.s (destroyers), 11 T.B.s (torpedo-boats), and seven submarines *outside* the shelters.

At first, a dredger, which was sunk by a torpedo alongside the Mole at Zeebrugge during our attack, was believed to be a submarine, but an excellent photograph, taken at low water, clearly identified her as the big dredger from which the two Belgians had escaped, and which we were so anxious to destroy.

Meanwhile the weekly returns of the proceedings of the Dover Patrol record much activity on the Belgian Coast, constant bombardments by monitors, air and C.M.B. attacks, and mining expeditions, close in to the enemy ports.

The whole spirit of the Patrol was ceaselessly offensive and aggressive, and everything we possessed waged war. My surveying and gunnery experts even devised a system of firing, which enabled the small monitors to get into action in close co-operation with our batteries, manned by the French near the coast.

Our efforts were most warmly appreciated by the fishermen of the Auxiliary patrols, who let us know through their Chiefs, that they felt avenged for the losses they had suffered in the



↓  
 AERIAL PHOTO OF BRUGES FROM 14,000 Ft:  
 25TH MAY, 1918

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| (1) Submarine Shelter.                                      | (2) Old Submarine Shelter. |
| (3) To Basin and Locks connecting with Ostend Canal System. |                            |
| (4) Floating Docks.   | (5) Canal to Zeebrugge.    |



February raid; and that they attributed the immunity from attack, which they had enjoyed for so long—and which persisted to the end—to our having “put the wind up the enemy.”

On the evening of the 11th May, there was a heavy explosion in the minefield, and oil in great quantities came to the surface, and a submarine was unquestionably destroyed. It was impossible to send down divers for some time, but two months later, while searching for another submarine, a second one was found with her stern blown off, which could not be identified. This was probably *UB119*, which (according to German accounts) attempted to pass through the Straits in May, and was never heard of again.

The anti-submarine measures, which I have previously outlined, were developing, and when they were sufficiently advanced to require a senior officer to devote all his time to their organisation, I suggested that Admiral Dampier should be given charge of all the arrangements in connection with them. This was approved, he was appointed to do so on the 1st June, and Captain Davidson was given the Dover Dockyard, with the rank of Commodore Second Class, as a reward for his services in the *Hindustan*.

Meanwhile our aircraft dropped bombs on all the German naval objectives, with ruthless determination, mainly on Bruges Naval Base; but it was maddening to reflect how much more we might have done, if the R.A.F. with its independent bombing force, had not been formed at the expense of the R.N.A.S., and so greatly to the detriment of the latter's strength and efficiency in my area.

I felt so strongly about it that I wrote very hotly to the Admiralty about it on 28th May (see Appendix IV), but supporters of the new policy had sections of the Press behind them, and carried more guns than the Admiralty, and though a direct appeal I made to Sir Douglas improved matters to some extent, golden opportunities were missed of inflicting heavy losses on the enemy.

Early in June, the south lock gate at Zeebrugge was damaged by a bomb, and an aerial photograph showed a large floating crane in the process of lifting the gate clear.

This intense bombing of Bruges Base provoked retaliation, and during the night of 6th–7th June, several squadrons of German aeroplanes dropped a great many bombs on Dunkirk and our aerodromes in the neighbourhood. This mass attack was evidently carried out by aircraft which had been specially

brought down for the purpose ; three of our officers and nine men were killed and a number wounded, five machines were wrecked, 48 damaged. Four hangars were burnt out, two wrecked and six damaged. I am sure the High Command were informed by the local German authorities that our aircraft were a nuisance, and that they could not compete with them. Whereupon orders had been given to wipe them out, and having done so, as they thought, our visitors returned to their stations.

Fortunately a great many of our aircraft were out, including the Handley Pages, who were raiding Bruges, and when they returned and found their home burning, they landed on the beach near Calais, and waited there until it was all over. I went over the next day to visit the damaged aerodrome and say a few words of sympathy to the gallant airmen, who were spoiling to retaliate, for the enemy had certainly succeeded in making an awful mess of their aerodrome. However, our airmen took it all very coolly, were just as offensive the next night, and dropped several tons of bombs on Bruges and Ostend Naval Bases during the next few days.

On the 15th June, aerial photographs showed exactly the same number of vessels at Bruges, but they were now well dispersed along the smaller canals.

Before daylight on 20th June, an enemy submarine was driven down into the minefield by drifters and sunk, and she was identified as *UC64*.

By the end of June, nearly all the special barrage light vessels for the deep minefield were in place. They had been ordered, on the strength of the Barrage Committee's recommendations, while I was still Director of Plans, and by the end of July, the light barrage patrol was organised, as shown on the plan (*see* page 380).

The enemy aircraft seemed to have been reinforced about this time, very bitter fighting took place, and we lost some machines, but inflicted far greater losses on the enemy. We certainly had command of the air in that area, despite our much reduced force, and our bombing squadrons made a habit of dropping 20 to 25 tons of bombs a week on enemy naval targets. One night, the enemy aircraft raided the lighted barrage patrol, and dropped a number of bombs near the light vessels, but did not succeed in hitting any of them.

On the 7th July, the *Erebus* was hit in Dunkirk harbour, two compartments in her bulges being filled with water. This was the first time, since I assumed command, that one of our vessels was hit by a bomb during an air raid, though many tons had been dropped in their vicinity.

While my splendid people had been hunting the submarines, and bombarding and bombing the enemy relentlessly, I had been engaged in another kind of battle, on the Admiralty front.

My fears that I would have difficulty in getting sufficient rewards for my gallant people were certainly fulfilled, and it was more difficult than I had imagined, even with all my Gallipoli experience.

The fact that I had been generously honoured, only made the shabby treatment my people were to receive all the more intolerable. In Gallipoli we were told that these things must be adjusted by scale; it would not be fair to the Grand Fleet if we were given more than our share. (This was before Jutland.) Admiral de Robeck could only have a certain percentage based on the number of people on the Station; which must be divided in a fixed proportion between officers and men; worked out, I suppose, on the complement of a battleship. The opportunities of winning distinction played no part in this ridiculous system of award by scale, which these unimaginative people introduced. The Authorities at the Admiralty, who dealt with the award of honours, seemed quite incapable of appreciating, that no one worth his salt wants an honour that he has not earned.

In the Grand Fleet after Jutland, judging by the honours list, squadrons present were similarly treated by scale; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that a squadron which had never been seriously engaged received the same number of honours as one that fought all through the battle and had heavy casualties. They did not seem to understand that it could not have given the Fleet Surgeon of the "*Nonsuch*" any real satisfaction to get a D.S.O. "for making excellent arrangements for the wounded" when there were none; if his best friend in the "*Diehard*," who had attended 100 wounded, and performed a score of critical operations, under conditions of incredible difficulty and strain, received nothing at all. Nevertheless this actually occurred.



I was told that I must not lower the standard of the V.C. The Authorities particularly objected to the ballot I had held for the collective V.C.s. "What had Bamford done to earn a V.C.? There was nothing in my despatch to warrant his being given one. Again did Sergeant Finch's act of valour, as described by me, come up to the high standard required for the V.C.?" and they insisted that their actions were to be adequately described. They had not troubled to study the precedents—but I knew the pre-War "book of the V.C." by heart. They would have saved themselves, and me, much waste of time, if they had looked up the records of collective V.C.s by ballot. There were only four altogether.

While this was going on, my friend Captain Herbert Richmond—a student of war and Naval and Military History—wrote to say that he had heard I was "having friction in the matter of awards" and that it might interest me to know that I was following the example of some very distinguished men, who took the same course as I had, and had had the same troubles with the "dispensers of patronage." Then followed a number of examples which had occurred during the past 200 years; but those in authority so seldom turn to the lessons of history for guidance.

In the meantime, a small committee had been appointed to consider my recommendations, presided over by the originator of the "Scale" method; and they were all cut down by scale accordingly.

I was told that the proportion of officers to men was too high, regardless of the fact that most of my recommendations for conspicuous gallantry, referred to the officers in command of the small craft inshore, where in most cases there were nearly as many officers as men engaged; as I had pointed out in my covering letter.

The two officers and four men in *C3* had all gone as we thought to certain death. I recommended that the Captain, who was responsible for his vessel reaching her goal, should be given the V.C., the second in command the D.S.O., and the four men each a C.G.M. (the equivalent of the Army D.C.M.), and I did not think that I was asking too much for their outstanding and very dangerous service. However, this was too much for the Admiralty scale, and two of the crew were only to be given a minor decoration instead. In the blockships, I recommended that the Captains should be given the D.S.O. and the other officers each a D.S.C., and that the men should

also be liberally rewarded. But the scale was again ruthlessly applied, and one officer and a proportion of the men in each blockship were cut out.

Of course I knew that I should only be able to get a limited number of decorations, and I had confined my recommendations to only the most conspicuous of the many, who had performed actions for which they would most certainly have been decorated in ordinary circumstances.

The following extracts from a letter which I wrote on the 4th June, 1918, indicates the line I took about it :

“I cannot say that I would necessarily have selected those elected by the officers and men for recommendation for the Victoria Cross, out of the many who earned it. If I recommended everyone for that honour who earned it, according to the standards of past awards, my list would contain more than a score of recommendations for the V.C. For this reason, I considered it advisable to do what has been done previously by the Army, under similar circumstances.

The fact that Bamford and Finch were mentioned in the course of the narrative of my despatch, has nothing whatever to do with the Victoria Cross. Their title rests on their election and is indisputable.

I really do not think you need be afraid that the Admiralty will be subjected to any criticism, on the score of recommending H.M. to grant honours on too liberal a scale for this operation, or that there will be any question as to the title of the four officers and men to the award of the V.C., since they have been selected by the survivors of those who took part in the assault on the Mole, to represent them.

With your assistance, however, I hope to enable the Admiralty to act in a way which will give the greatest satisfaction to the whole Navy, and incidentally redound to the credit of the present Board ! ”

And in conclusion, apropos of a complaint that my recommendations were not eulogistic enough, I wrote :

“I notice that recently the Army has gone in for journalistic paragraphs in their recommendations—sometimes in rather questionable taste. I do so greatly prefer

the quiet restrained language they used in the early days of the War. I suppose the change is due to the influx of K.C.s and politicians, whom wise generals get on to their Staffs, to help them fight—not the enemy—but attacks such as those from which I am suffering—I am afraid not too patiently. I do feel so strongly, that all one's energies should be devoted to fighting the enemy only, and that I waste a good deal of time, since I am hopelessly slow and stupid on paper, and rather incoherent, and lose my temper too easily, about things that really don't matter; but the Admiralty are so infernally rude. I wonder who drafts telegrams such as No. 123 of 30th May?"

I was quite determined to get the limited number of decorations I had asked for, and so I made some excuse, every time I was summoned to an investiture. Some rumour of this must have reached the King, because when I accompanied him to France, His Majesty told me he understood that I had been having trouble over my recommendations, so he had inquired into it himself, and had been assured by the Admiralty, that everyone I had recommended would receive either promotion or a decoration, but that the Admiralty had made a rule that no one could be given both for the same action, except in the case of a V.C.

I said that I had not questioned this new rule, though it had not been enforced in 1917 in the Dover Patrol. The King went on to say that it would give him great pleasure to knight me at one of the public Investitures, which (during the War) he held in the quadrangle of Buckingham Palace.

I felt much honoured by His Majesty's interest, and grateful for his help, and as I was told by the Admiralty, that the *Gazette* was about to be published, I arranged to go up to London the following week. Unfortunately the *Gazette* was delayed, and did not appear until after I had been knighted.

A few days later, the evening before the *Gazette* was actually to be published, a friend at the Admiralty sent me a proof copy; and to my fury, I noticed that six names had been omitted. I had reluctantly agreed to cut out three officers, whom I had originally pressed for, because although their services were of the utmost value to the execution of the plan, they had not actually taken part in the inshore fighting; but the six who

were omitted had been in the thick of the fighting, and had earned their recognition just as much as some of those who were to receive decorations, and they included people in the blockships ; and so I was determined not to accept this decision.

I sent for Boyle and Tomkinson, and told them that I was going up to the Admiralty, and would not return to Dover unless the names were re-inserted in the *Gazette*. I then telephoned to Reggie Hall, and suggested that he should tell Sir Eric Geddes what I was coming up for.

On arrival at the Admiralty, I went into the First Lord's room, and Sir Eric's first words showed that my good friend Reggie Hall had taken a hand. He said : " Well, Keyes, we are not going to fall out over a few decorations, are we ? " I replied : " I hope not. " After I had explained matters, he sent for the officer concerned, and said that the names of certain officers and men, who I understood were to receive decorations, had been omitted in the forthcoming *Gazette* ; they were to be replaced. The officer replied that it was too late, the *Gazette* had been passed, and copies had already been issued to the Press. Sir Eric said then the issue must be stopped, and he asked me to dictate the names of those I wished replaced. I did so, and I also added the three I had been previously persuaded to drop, with, I am afraid, rather a malicious grin at the officer, who was a very old friend of mine.

On going out, I met one of the Sea Lords in the passage, and he asked me what I was doing at the Admiralty, and I replied : " Fighting a battle. "

I did not bother Admiral Wemyss to come to my support in that action. He had so much to do, and so many battles of his own to fight, on the Downing Street Front ; but when I found that Roger Rede, who displayed such initiative in the action off Dunkirk on the 14th March, was not to be promoted—as I had been practically promised, I appealed to Admiral Wemyss, and reminded him of the great moral value of Rede's action ; apart from the destruction of two enemy vessels, plucked from a superior force. It was so hard that he should lose the promotion he so thoroughly deserved, because in the meantime more spectacular actions had taken place. The Service was full of gallant officers, who would face great odds without hesitation when led, but the gift of rapid decision, initiative, and readiness

to accept responsibility, was given to few, and Rede had displayed all these excellent qualities.

Admiral Wemyss' letter, in reply to mine, is amongst those I prize, and Rede was promoted the following December. I shall always be grateful to Admiral Wemyss and to Sir Eric Geddes for bearing with me so patiently.

During the night of 10th July, the submarine *UC77* was destroyed in the minefield; and on the 14th, after a violent explosion, oil and bubbles proved that another submarine had been sunk. This was probably *UB108* (which according to German records) was lost about that time, on her way to the English Channel.

At the end of July, H.M.S. *Gorgon* joined the Patrol. She was being built for Norway as a coast defence battleship, when war broke out, so the Admiralty bought her. Her 9.4-inch guns were lined to take our 9.2-inch projectiles, and given an elevation of 45 degrees, which enabled her to fire at a range of about 35,000 yards. On the 26th July, she calibrated her guns on a German howitzer battery, at a range of 33,000 yards, and Leugenboom replied with a few shells, at a range of over 50,000 yards (over 28 miles).

We had many distinguished visitors during July. The Duke of Connaught and his Staff came to lunch on the way to France on the 3rd, and on the 11th the King and Queen of the Belgians lunched with us on their way to London.

Officers on their way backwards and forwards to France often called in for a meal, and we saw many friends in this way. One night Winston Churchill brought the Duke of Westminster in to dinner, and we had an interesting talk about the Dardanelles.

Mr. Glyn Philpot was sent down by the Admiralty to paint my portrait for the War Museum, and stayed two or three days, but I was too busy to give him more than a couple of short sittings.

On the 30th July, Mr. Franklin Roosevelt\*—Under-Secretary of the United States Navy—Mr. Livingston Davis and an American naval officer, came to lunch, and made arrangements for the U.S. naval aeroplanes to work under my orders from Dunkirk, when they arrived.

After the Admiralty had put a stop to our third attempt to

\* Now President of the United States of America

block Ostend my life was much less strenuous, and I paid several visits to France and Flanders, visiting the aerodromes and batteries within my command; our G.H.Q. and the Belgian Headquarters, and occasionally the Headquarters of friends—General Byng, who commanded the Third Army, and General Braithwaite, who now commanded a Corps. I had found that I could get through much more work travelling by air, and a D.H.9 aeroplane, from the aerodrome on the cliffs above my house, was always available.

Our ceaseless aggression had naturally brought retaliation, but though there were 21 air raids in all during 1918, Dover was not much damaged; it mainly fell on Dunkirk, so I took great pains to establish good relations with the Authorities there, and was lucky to have such good allies as Admiral Ronarc'h, Captain Boisanger and the Military Governor, General Pauffin de St. Maurel.

On the 5th August, I accompanied the King to Calais in the *Whirlwind*; he said he would like to see something of my command, while he was in France, and asked me what I would like him to do. I told His Majesty that if he would come to Dunkirk, and would permit me to ask the principal French officials to meet him, it would give them great pleasure, and would be some recompense to them for all they had suffered on account of our activities. The King said that he would be glad to do so, and told me to make arrangements with Lord Stamfordham. I must confess I had a few qualms afterwards, Leugenboom might by chance interrupt the ceremony; no doubt His Majesty would enjoy it, but the Government would want my head on a charger for running such a risk.

On 8th August, Lord Stamfordham wrote to tell me that he was afraid it could not be managed; but added a postscript to say that the King had since suggested that if I could arrange to have a destroyer at Calais on the 13th, he would motor from G.H.Q. to Dunkirk in the morning, and drive me back to Calais, where we would embark for Dover.

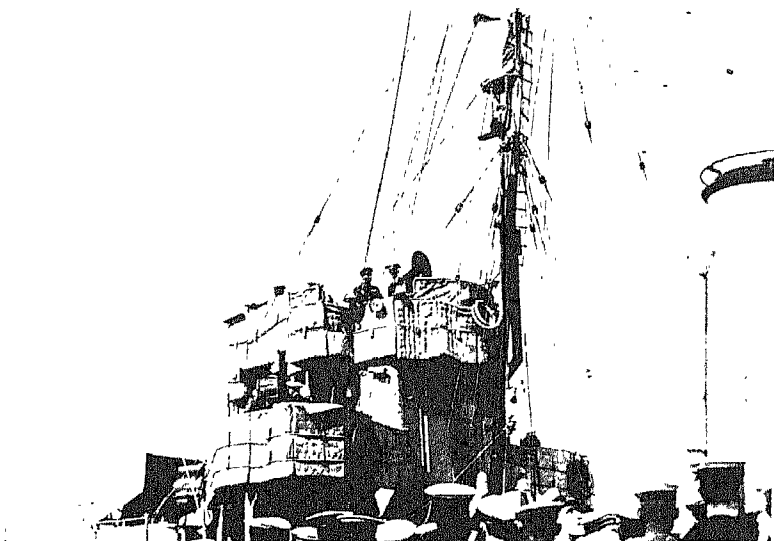
All went according to plan. I collected the French officers and the King received them on the quarter-deck of the *Erebus*. His Majesty then presented the decorations which I had been able to obtain for French officers and men, who had served

under my command during the recent offensives ; and also to the destroyer Captains, who had supported Roger Rede so loyally on 14th March. I had hoped that the General would receive a Knighthood, in time for His Majesty to give him the accolade ; but when he eventually received it, he was invited to dine and sleep at Buckingham Palace, in order that the King might present it to him personally. This gracious act was immensely appreciated by the French at Dunkirk, and was of great value to the Dover Patrol. All went well, Leugenboom kept quiet, and we were all very grateful to the King for spending such a long and tiring day in our interest.

During one of His Majesty's visits, I asked him to inspect our aerodromes with me, and Lambe presented a one-legged officer named Gow, who had done photographic work for us. We were told that the doctors who examined him before joining never noticed that he was short of a leg ! A few days later, an airman named Gow appeared in the casualty list as killed, and I received a letter the next day from Lord Stamfordham, with a message from His Majesty, saying that he hoped that it was not our gallant one-legged airman, and I was glad to be able to reply that our Gow was all right, though his observer had recently been wounded by shrapnel, at a height of 14,000 feet, while taking photographs of Zeebrugge.

On 7th August, the *Abdiel* (Captain Berwick Curtis) and five other minelaying destroyers arrived, and, escorted by destroyers of the Sixth Flotilla under Captain Tomkinson, laid a field of a new type of magnetic mine in the approaches to Zeebrugge, during the night. Curtis was very down on his luck when he arrived, as only a few days previously, two of his minelayers were blown up on enemy mines in the Heligoland Bight, with the loss of a good many lives. However, before he actually reached his base at Immingham, we were able to tell him that his new minefield had already proved successful. From air reconnaissance and other reports, we knew that a German destroyer had been sunk in it the following morning ; other explosions had been located in the minefield by our directional station, which we hoped were the minesweepers, sent out to sweep up our minefield, blowing up.\*

\* After Bruges fell into our hands, we found a chart in Admiral von Schröder's office, with a blue circle round a large area, which included our new minefield, with the words : "Enç. exp. mine."



THE KING AND SIR ROGER KEYES ON THE BRIDGE OF  
THE WHIRLWIND. 13TH AUGUST, 1918

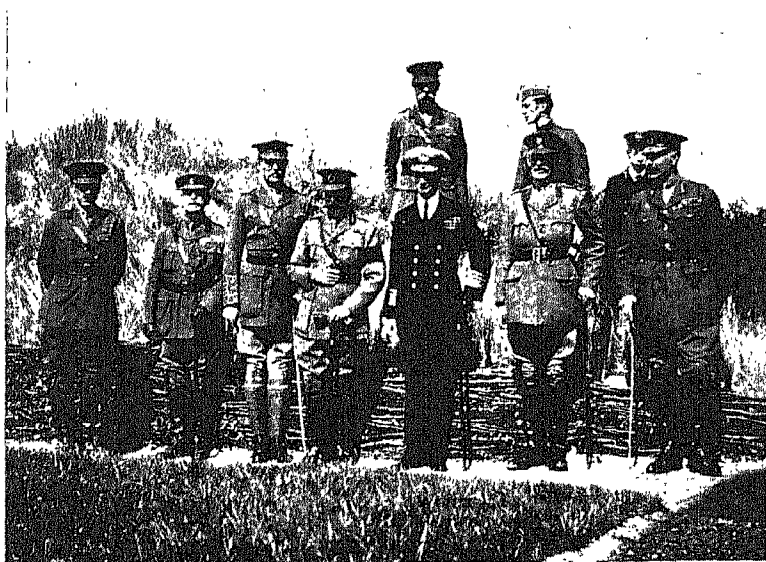


PHOTO TAKEN BY THE QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS AT LA PANNE  
Lord Cromer, Lord Stamfordham, King of the Belgians, The King, Sir Roger  
Keyes, Major Thompson, Lord Athlone  
Back Row—Sir Derek Keppel, Prince Leopold, Prince Charles  
AUGUST, 1918





## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BELGIAN COAST OFFENSIVE

*UB109* sunk in controlled minefield ; Visit to Cassel ; Accompany Sir Douglas Haig to England ; Correspondence about Army reinforcements ; *Glatton* explosion ; Fly to France and Flanders ; Plans for Belgian Coast Offensive ; *The Offensive* opens ; Great Advance ; Brought to a standstill ; Visits to London, Ypres and G.H.Q. train.

ON 29th August, the controlled minefield scored a success. At 3.10 a.m. the Folkestone Observation Station reported a fast-running reciprocating engine, proceeding to the eastward. About a quarter of an hour later, the watcher on Shakespeare Cliff saw the needle of his galvanometer swing and pressed the button ; whereupon there was a big explosion and two German officers and six men came to the surface, in a huge bubble of air, and were picked up by one of our trawlers. We learnt that the submarine was *UB109*, and that her captain had hoped to avoid the unknown perils under the illuminated barrage, which the Flanders submarines dreaded—and which for some time they had not been ordered to face—by following the traffic route, through the swept channel between Folkestone and Dover.

The success of Professor Bragg's loop was a great satisfaction to me, as the whole new scheme of anti-submarine defence, which the towers were to fulfil, was dependent upon the efficiency of the Bragg mined loop. It only remained to prove that the towers could be taken out, sunk and ballasted in the selected positions, to justify the expenditure on their construction.

It is true that the submarine menace in the Straits of Dover was defeated, before the towers were actually finished, by a combination of the deep minefield, Brock's flares and the dense patrol ; but the latter was only maintained in all weather, thanks to the courage and endurance of the fishermen of the Auxiliary Patrol. When the towers were ordered, we could not count on such an overwhelming success. The patrol was a hideous anxiety, it had been heavily raided, and the tower scheme promised

to provide a complete and effective barrier, without subjecting some hundreds of fishermen to great risks and fearful hardships.

Our Army's August offensive, which was the turn of the tide, was now in full blast, and on 29th August Sir Douglas Haig telegraphed to say that he would very much like to see me. I went over to G.H.Q. to lunch with him a few days later, and he gave me an outline of the situation, and asked me to be ready to co-operate with the troops on the left flank in an offensive, which was likely to reach the coast before long. We discussed plans, and agreed that anything on the lines of Bacon's so-called "Great Landing" was out of the question, but I left him in no doubt as to my determination to give the utmost naval assistance.

The Dardanelles were never very far from my thoughts, and as the tide had turned on the Western Front, and the re-occupation of the Belgian Coast was only a matter of time, I raised the question of forcing the Straits once again with Admiral Wemyss.

It seemed to me that a moment would certainly arrive, when the presence of a fleet in the Marmora, would be bound to have a decisive effect on the Allied Campaign against Bulgaria and Turkey, and I suggested that when the enemy evacuated the Belgian Coast, I should be allowed to take all the C.M.B.s and a few destroyers, fitted with the latest minesweeping device, to smoke-screen and sweep for the passage of a squadron of old battleships into the Marmora. Possibly Admiral Beatty would be able to spare two or three of the older Dreadnoughts, but anyhow we had the *Lord Nelson*, *Agamemnon*, and seven "King Edwards," besides a number of the older pre-Dreadnoughts. I was convinced that no enemy action could possibly stop a squadron equipped with paravanes, and escorted by destroyers and C.M.B.s.

Admiral Wemyss quite agreed, and promised me that I should command the expedition, if the situation arose which I had envisaged.

By that time, Major Godfrey had joined my Staff, and he and Sandford set to work to prepare a detailed plan.

On 9th September, I was asked by the Admiralty to provide a destroyer to take Sir Henry Wilson—the C.I.G.S.—to France

at once. I had just previously received a telegram from Sir Douglas Haig, asking me to meet him at Mount Cassel that day ; so I sent the destroyer—which was standing by for me—to Folkestone to take the C.I.G.S. to Calais, and flew myself to Bergues Aerodrome, where a motor met me and took me to General Plumer's Headquarters, which were now back on Mount Cassel. Marshal Foch arrived shortly after me, and Sir Douglas Haig introduced me to him. He said a few very nice things to me, and then asked Sir Douglas to tell us all to leave the room. He only wished Sir Douglas, General Plumer and their Chiefs of Staff to remain. By that time Sir Henry Wilson and his Military Secretary (Lord Duncannon, now Earl of Bessborough) had arrived, and we went down together to lunch with General Plumer's Staff.

We had just finished lunch when Sir Douglas came down, and taking me aside, asked me in an undertone if I could take him over to England at once. He said that he was going to lunch by the roadside, at a spot which he showed me on the map, and said if I would join him there, after I had made the necessary arrangements, we could drive to Calais together, when he would tell me all about it.

It happened that the *Douglas*—a new flotilla leader—faster and more powerful than anything the Dover Patrol had previously possessed, had joined the flotilla (in place of the disabled *Warwick*) a few days before ; so I ordered her to Calais at once. I was able to telephone direct to Dover in a few minutes, and finding that the *Douglas* would be at Calais by the time we arrived there by car, I joined Sir Douglas Haig and we drove on together.

By that time it was blowing very hard from the north, and I was very glad to have an excuse for not flying home.

Sir Douglas told me the object of Marshal Foch's visit. We were going to finish the War in 1918, and he was going over to persuade the Government to give him all the troops, which it had been intended to keep in England until 1919. Foch had already been to the Belgian Headquarters that morning, to ask the King of the Belgians to allow the Belgian Army to co-operate, and to take supreme command of an Allied Army ; consisting of his, a French Corps, and the British Second Army ; if Sir Douglas would consent to put it under the King's

orders. Foch proposed that General Degoutte—one of his generals—should act as Chief of Staff to the King. Sir Douglas had agreed, but had refused one other request for a division of cavalry, which he said, he could not spare, as he required all his cavalry for his own break through. He went on to say, that he knew I would be glad to co-operate in every way in my power, and that he had assured Foch that I would do so.

When we got to Calais, we embarked in the *Douglas* (Commander R. Rede), and though it was blowing a northerly gale, there had not been much time for the sea to get up, and we crossed the Channel at over 30 knots in a cloud of spray. I arranged for Sir Douglas to be taken back again by his namesake next day. I went to see him off, and he told me the Government had agreed to his request.

A day or two later, I received a letter from Sir Eric Geddes, asking me to give every assistance to an Admiral, who was being sent round to all the naval bases and shore establishments, to comb out men, who could be better employed "in sustaining our military effort, whether by land or sea."

I replied that the Admiral could certainly count on my help, but that when I took command, my Chief of Staff had replaced a number of able-bodied young seamen, acting as messengers and orderlies, with old four-to-six badge Marines and Naval pensioners. I had shut down the quite unnecessary and very uneconomical submarine base, and latterly a number of W.R.N.S. had relieved men in various shore duties.

I could, however, suggest action on the part of the Admiralty, which would relieve thousands of able-bodied fighting men. I then referred to my previous efforts in this direction, when a Captain in the Grand Fleet (*see* pages 102 and 148) and later as Director of Plans. I reminded him that Admiral Wemyss had strongly supported a joint memorandum in November, 1917, prepared by Plans Division and the Director of Military Operations, reviewing the whole question of invasion, with the object of releasing troops kept in England, to resist a purely imaginary danger.

Lord Jellicoe, however, and the Board as a whole, would not apparently accept it. It was possible that the joint conference and interchange of views did good, released a certain number of troops, and awoke the War Office to the fact that the beaches

were inadequately prepared to resist a landing. Great improvements had been made in the military areas in my neighbourhood during the last few months, but much more could be done.

It seemed to me an outrage that several hundreds of splendid yeomanry should be maintained to resist a landing in Thanet, or elsewhere in Kent. I knew Sir Douglas Haig would give anything for these men in France; operations were taking place in which they could give invaluable aid, and yet they were kept so busy, preparing for the invasion of Kent, that they could not even be spared to help in getting in the harvest.

Surely the Admiralty could give an absolute guarantee that no landing would take place in Kent. I was quite prepared to do so.

Only that day I had received a request from the General at Canterbury for assistance, to construct concrete machine-gun strong points, to resist a landing at Dungeness! I said it was difficult to write temperately about such folly.

In coming to a decision in regard to invasion, it would clearly be necessary to consider the probability, and not only the certainties and unlikely possibilities. Surely the chance of a landing in Kent could not be rated as high as an unlikely possibility; in fact, I would say that the impossibility of such a landing was an absolute certainty; and yet we kept a mobile force of thousands of fine fighting men in hard training, riding, bicycling or marching about the country, waiting for invasion; when the Army in France was desperately hard up for reinforcements, and every effort was being made to comb out individuals, the majority of whom, at best, would probably only swell that great army behind the lines, and would never be fit for actual fighting. I concluded: "I feel very strongly on this subject."

On 16th September, *UB103* was destroyed in the minefield, and I believe that she was the last German submarine to attempt the passage of the Straits.

The monitor *General Wolfe* with a new 18-inch gun arrived in time to get in some practice before the offensive commenced; and the *Glatton* also arrived; she was a sister ship of the *Gorgon* and was commanded by Commander Neston Diggle, an old friend, who had been in command of the *Attentive*, and who I was glad to get back in the Patrol. He was very pleased with

his new ship, and had made desperate efforts to get her completed in time to take part in our offensive.

On the 16th September, we took Diggle to see our children in their bungalow near the South Foreland lighthouse. We went for a walk on the cliffs, and had not got far, when we heard and saw a great explosion in Dover harbour, appearing over the cliffs like an enormous mushroom.

We ran back to the house to telephone, and found my office calling me up, to tell me that one of the *Glatton's* shell rooms or magazines had blown up and the ship was on fire. The only car available was an old Ford of my wife's, and she drove us back at break-neck speed down the steep hill past the castle. When we arrived at the pier, a number of terribly burnt people were being landed.

Diggle and I went on board at once, climbing up over the bows, as she was ablaze from the break of the forecastle to right aft, the flames going as high as her masts. I was pleased, but not surprised, to find Boyle and Tomkinson already on board. Captain Irons' salvage tugs were lying alongside pumping furiously, but making little or no impression on the fire. There was a large ammunition ship, full of ammunition for our next offensive, lying in the next berth, and tugs were just getting her in tow, to take her out of her dangerous position.

Boyle told me that he had been in the ship about 15 minutes, and he had found no executive officer left on board. He did not think the after magazine could have been flooded owing to the blazing oil fuel. Everybody in the after part of the ship had been either killed, badly injured, or had had to jump overboard to escape the flames. The explosion had occurred in the secondary armaments small magazine, which had caused the oil fuel to spread and burn furiously.

A young surgeon, who happened to be forward when the explosion occurred, was the only officer of the ship on board, when Diggle and I arrived. No one knew where the flooding keys of the fore magazine were to be found. Diggle at once went below, with a petty officer of the *Glatton*, who had been ashore on leave, but who returned to the ship, directly he saw that she was on fire, and they flooded the fore magazine, and opened all the sea-cocks that could be got at.

The trim of the ship gave certain indication that the after

magazine could not have been flooded, and as the fire could not be got under by the salvage tugs and it was impossible to get aft, or at the sea-cocks elsewhere, to sink the ship, the explosion of the after magazine could only be a question of time. There were a good many men below, cut off by the flames and crying for help, and every possible effort was made to extricate them; the work being carried out by officers and men from other ships, who had climbed over the bows. Many acts of great gallantry were performed in saving the lives of injured men below.

After about 45 minutes, all cries below having ceased, I ordered the ship to be abandoned, and when this had been done, Boyle, Tomkinson, Diggle and I left in a salvage tug, which had remained alongside, pumping hard, until the last moment. I hailed the nearest destroyer, to ask if she had steam ready—all the craft in the neighbourhood had been ordered to raise steam by Boyle, when the explosion occurred. The Captain replied: "Yes," so I went on board and gave orders to slip and run close to the *Glatton*. To my disgust, she was unable to move. Her Captain's anxiety to do something to help was ahead of his steam. I then went on board the *Myngs* (Lieut.-Commander J. R. Johnston), which was just getting under way, and told her Captain to stand by to torpedo the *Glatton*, and to lie sufficiently near her to ensure that a torpedo would not dive under her; and said that the safety fan of the torpedo was to be run off before it was fired.\* The torpedo gunner did not realise that we were going so close and kept a bit in hand. When the torpedo was fired, it pierced the *Glatton's* anti-torpedo bulge, and the nose of the torpedo remained embedded in the bulge, while its propeller churned up the water, but the torpedo did not explode. By that time I was in a fever of impatience, and said that the safety fan was to be run off altogether in the next torpedo, and it exploded well, blowing a great hole in the *Glatton's* bulge. I expected to see her heel over, and being anxious that she should sink on an even keel, to facilitate salvage, I told Johnston to run round the other side and fire another torpedo; but when we got there, I realised that if we fired the torpedo there, and by any chance

\* The safety fan prevents the torpedo exploding until it is 100 yards away from the ship firing it.



it should pass under her, it might do damage to the vessels beyond; so I returned to the original side, where the range was clear as far as the breakwater, and told Johnston to lay his ship abreast of the hole in the bulge, and fire the next torpedo into it; as the ship was still upright and apparently unaffected, the bulge having taken the full force of the 21-inch torpedo.

This time there was no doubt about it. The next torpedo only had a few yards to run, it went into the hole made by its predecessor and blew in the *Glatton's* side on the water line, while we fled at full speed, directly the torpedo left the ship, to get out of the way of possible trouble. To my intense relief, the *Glatton* slowly rolled over on to her beam ends, and capsized in a cloud of black smoke and steam, as the fire was quenched.

Meanwhile my wife had gone to Fleet House and was watching from the balcony, where she was joined soon after by General Hickie, who—fearful of the horrors of the ammunition ship explosion at Halifax—which had devastated that town—had sounded the air raid warning, and brought down troops to clear the streets and houses on the sea front, and wanted her to leave. However, she declined to move, as she told him that I was on board the *Glatton*, and she meant to stay and see what happened. She had a good companion in Franks of the *Iphigenia*, who had recovered from his appendicitis, and had come down to see if I could find him a job, and learning what had occurred, remained with her until I came back.

I went straight to my office and telephoned to Admiral Wemyss, to tell him that I was sorry, I had had to torpedo the *Glatton* in Dover Harbour, to prevent her blowing up and doing a lot of damage. His reply was characteristic, he said: "Good God! . . . I am sure you did the right thing, old boy," and his telephone rang off with a click. As a matter of fact, I think that he must have been kept informed by my office of what was going on, and probably knew I was on board and did not want to talk about it.

Besides 60 killed and missing, 19 of the officers and men were very badly burnt; they were taken to Dover Military Hospital and to Deal, where we visited them. Everything possible was done for them, but a good many died during the next week

Afterwards I recommended Lieutenant G. D. Belben (second in command of the *Thetis*), Sub-Lieutenant D. Evans, R.N.V.R., Petty Officer A. E. Stoker, and Able Seaman E. Nunn, for the Albert medal, for their gallantry in rescuing injured men, at great risk of their own lives; and also Surgeon Lieut.-Commander Edward L. Atkinson of the *Glatton*, who in spite of very severe injuries, brought other injured officers from below on to the quarter-deck, and thus saved their lives, as they were taken off in boats before the after-part of the ship was entirely enveloped in flames.\*

On 19th September, Prince Leopold and Prince Charles of Belgium came to tea at Fleet House, on their way back to Eton and Dartmouth respectively.

During the rest of the month, I paid frequent visits to France and Flanders, and made all the necessary arrangements for our co-operation with the Army. I found General Degoutte very pleasant to work with, and during those days, I saw much of the King and Queen of the Belgians.

The King told me how grateful he was to Winston Churchill, for his intervention at Antwerp, and the services which the Naval Division performed. He said that in his opinion, the Antwerp and Gallipoli strokes were the two best strategic efforts in the War; and that he and the Belgian Army owed Churchill a great debt; for the arrival of the Naval Division at Antwerp, at a very critical moment, had enabled the Belgians to withdraw behind the Yser, reorganise the Army, and hold a small strip of Belgium and the left flank of the Allied line.†

On 24th September, all our plans were ready, and after breakfast I flew to St. André, accompanied by Osborne with the bombarding charts in another aeroplane. After lunch with Sir Douglas Haig, we flew up to Bergues Aerodrome; but Osborne's plane did not arrive, and my pilot told me that he thought that the plane must have got into difficulties, and landed at one of the disused aerodromes, of which there were two or three on the route. I sent my pilot back to try and find them, and went on by car to La Panne, where I had tea

\* Atkinson was the author of those wonderful epitaphs on the graves of Captain Scott and his companions in the Antarctic.

† After the War, the King said all this to Churchill in my presence; although I have not seen any mention of this in Churchill's books on the War.

with the King of the Belgians, and arranged certain matters, in connection with our naval co-operation in the coming offensive. On returning to Bergues, I could get no news of either my aeroplane or Osborne's, and as it was getting late, I borrowed another to fly me home.

My own pilot always crossed the Channel at a height of a few hundred feet, in order to avoid unnecessary delay in climbing, as I was generally in a hurry; but my new pilot took me up to 10,000 feet; I suppose he thought he ought not to run any risks with an Admiral, so we laboriously climbed up to a height of 10,000 feet before we left the coast. Unfortunately my flying kit was in the other plane, and I got very cold, but I enjoyed my flight, as it was a clear evening, and I could see almost the whole of my command like a map below me.

By the time we arrived at Dover, it was blowing pretty fresh and was nearly dark, and we had an uncomfortably bumpy landing. To my relief Osborne and my pilot greeted me; they had flown straight back to Dover, having learnt—when they telephoned to Bergues—that I had just left. Osborne's plane had had to make a forced landing on a disused aerodrome, and he had been unable to communicate, until my plane had picked him up.

I invited my young pilot—who looked about 20—to dine, and he accepted; but someone told me that his wife lived at Ashford, so I sent him over there in a car instead. I knew that he would be in the thick of our new offensive within a few days, and the proportion of young airmen who survived aerial combat, in those days, was not high.

Three divisions of our Second Army, and the Belgian Army, with three French divisions of infantry and three of cavalry in support, were to open the offensive simultaneously at dawn on the 28th September. Our object was to keep the enemy in doubt, throughout the previous night, as to whether a landing on the coast was intended, in order to prevent their Army Corps on the coast being withdrawn, to resist the Allied Army's offensive elsewhere.

To this end, two divisions of monitors and the R.M.A. siege guns were to fire at the German coastal batteries and at certain sections of the coast, smoke-screens being made at the same

time, close in off the shore, if the direction of the wind permitted. After daylight, the two divisions of monitors, reinforced by a third, and the R.M.A. siege guns, were to endeavour to destroy the enemy's communications, cut roads and railways, and generally harass his movements between Nieuport, Ostend and inland; while keeping the batteries under fire, which were within range of the Belgian Army's attack.

The question of naval co-operation, in the later stages of the attack, was discussed with G.H.Q. and they wished, if possible, to land a brigade at Ostend; but on no account was this to be attempted, until the Army had reached the outskirts of the town.

I agreed to embark the troops in three 12-inch monitors and to endeavour to run them in under cover of a smoke-screen at high water; the object being to prevent the blocking of the harbour and destruction of the docks, to assist the final capture of the town and support the further advance of the Army.

Sir Douglas Haig asked me to lend one of my air squadrons to the Belgian Army, as they were very short of aircraft and he could not spare any R.A.F. machines. I had already arranged with Lambe, for all the aircraft under my command to co-operate in the attack with the Belgian Army, in every possible way, day and night.

I went to Dunkirk on the afternoon of the 27th September, and hoisted my flag in the *Prince Eugene*—Captain Ernest Wigram—the senior officer of a division of the 12-inch and 9.2-inch gun monitors, which was to engage the enemy's batteries to the westward of Ostend in the first phase, and eventually enter Ostend.

The *Erebus* and *Terror* were to operate independently during the night in the Zeebrugge area.

As the monitors were to anchor well inside the range of the enemy's heavy batteries, they were not to take up their positions until after dark.

It was blowing very hard from W. by N. with driving rain, when our bombardment commenced, and in the morning 12 of our aircraft, which had carried out their programme most gallantly, did not return (amongst them the young pilot who flew me from Bergues).\* A damaged plane had not much

\* He was taken prisoner.

chance of returning in the teeth of the gale, but we hoped that some of the missing pilots would have landed in Holland, or behind the German lines.

We were told that the King and Queen of the Belgians spent most of the afternoon and the night before, in their front line trenches encouraging their troops; and that the Belgian Army advanced with great dash. Both the British and Belgian Armies broke clean through the enemy's resistance, and gained their primary objectives at an early hour. Unfortunately, the weather conditions seriously hampered the movement of artillery, and the transport of ammunition and supplies; and the Belgian infantry were soon well ahead of their communications; and eventually the most advanced troops were supplied with ammunition and food by our aeroplanes, which dropped loads of both in their vicinity.

As the British and Belgians advanced, the line was considerably extended, and when the moment arrived for the French divisions to advance between them, to play their part and give the *coup de grace* that General Degoutte had intended, by capturing Roulers, they did not do all that was expected of them; the General made no secret of his disgust at their lack of enterprise.

Our airmen's reports made it clear that the enemy were in full retreat, and that there was nothing to stop a rapid advance. General Degoutte was particularly indignant with his cavalry, and declared that they might have advanced and broken right through (as Sir Douglas Haig had always hoped that the British cavalry would be able to do before the end), and he told me that he had dismounted them and set them to roadmaking. The French troops who had fought so magnificently in their own country, made no secret of their determination not to die in the mud of Flanders, and so the whole offensive was brought to a standstill, after the Belgians had advanced 12 miles through the Houthoult Forest, with casualties amounting to 25 per cent. of their whole effective Army. Our Second Army had also made a splendid advance and their losses amounted to about the same number, i.e. about 12,000.

This delay gave the enemy time to reorganise their defence, and lack of reserves made it impossible for the Belgian Army to exploit its initial advantage by further infantry action. The attack consequently came to a premature conclusion by the

3rd October. By this time the enemy had completely blocked the harbour at Ostend, and the landing as originally planned had to be abandoned.

A fresh scheme for landing on the beach at Ostend was put forward, but was rejected by the Belgian Headquarters, which now ruled out any direct attack on Ostend; they declared that they were anxious not to give the enemy any excuse to destroy the town, and trusted to freeing it and Bruges by an advance inland. The plans were consequently modified.

The Belgian Headquarters were immensely impressed with the work of our airmen, and sent me a letter of the warmest thanks, and General Degoutte wrote me a grateful letter; he declared that the results of our naval co-operation were very valuable, and had held the German divisions in the regions of Ostend and Bruges to the coast; and he said that he felt sure it would be equally valuable in the attack when it was renewed.

There was now an interval of 11 days, while preparations were being made to renew the attack by bringing up artillery, ammunition, stores, etc., within reach of the advanced positions.

Directly the advance was checked, I went back to England to see Admiral Wemyss, and having been in close association throughout with the King of the Belgians, General Plumer, and General Degoutte, I gave him my views very freely on the situation. He at once asked the Director of Military Operations to come to the Admiralty and hear them, which he did, and telegraphed the gist of them to the C.I.G.S., who was in Paris.

I told them that there was very little opposition in front of the Allied Army in Flanders. The French troops in that area, however, had not made any progress, and did not appear to have made any determined effort. Up to the present, all the fighting had been done by the Belgian Army and the Second British Army, which were both tired, and one fourth of the Belgian Army were casualties. There was clear evidence that the enemy's naval forces were being withdrawn, but if we did not get on, the enemy might well hold positions to cover their forts, and their naval occupation might be re-established. I said that I gathered that the capture of the high ground at Thourout and its vicinity, would ensure the evacuation of the Flanders naval bases, and urged the importance of the naval situation; and the value of Ostend, as a further line of communications

for the supply of the left flank of the Allied Army. Admiral Wemyss pointed out the great importance of securing Ostend and Zeebrugge, which would release a large force for service elsewhere, where they were urgently needed; but it would be impossible to release any vessels until those ports were in our hands. I said that I understood that Sir Douglas Haig might not be able to spare troops, as he was heavily engaged farther south; but that it was quite time that we realised that invasion was impossible, and that steps should be taken at once to release the fine striking force, which was being maintained for the defence of the East Coast. The D.M.O. promised to urge this point, and Admiral Wemyss promised to do all he could to further it. I remarked that I was afraid that any decision regarding this, in the absence of the majority of the War Cabinet in Paris, would probably be too late to meet our immediate needs.

I then returned to France, and after seeing General Plumer, and telling him what I had done, I had a look at the area over which his troops had been fighting, and was amazed; it seemed almost incredible that an assault could have been delivered over such a waste of mud, shell holes and wire, as existed round Ypres.

My brother-in-law, Hugh Bowlby, who was on leave from the Grand Fleet, came to Ypres with me, to try and find the graves of his two soldier brothers, who were killed near there. We found one in the garden of a destroyed chateau, its wooden cross had been damaged by a shell, and so I had another made to replace it. When we got back to Dunkirk, Leugenboom was shelling the harbour, which cheered Bowlby up a little, as he said he had seen nothing of war since he had left the Dardanelles.

Sir Douglas Haig wished to see me, and invited me to stay with him for a night in his train, which was in a small wood in the Cambrai area. When I arrived, Marshal Foch had only just left Sir Douglas, who was very pleased with a remark that the former had made (apropos of the fierce offensive which had been launched on the 13th August, and was still raging fiercely; and Germany's feelers for peace): "It is the hammer blows of the British Army that is making the Boche squeal for an Armistice."

Sir Douglas said that Marshal Foch had told him about the American offensive in the Argonne, which he said, had been delivered with great impetuosity, but the success of which had been limited to a great extent by the lack of Staff experience and the consequent breakdown of their transport.

I had a most interesting evening with Sir Douglas, and while I was his guest learnt much, and heard a good deal from his Staff of what was going on.

While I was there, the news came in that Mount Kemmel—which had just been lost, when I was with him at Mount Cassel—had fallen into our hands again.

I found some old friends on Sir Douglas Haig's Staff, amongst them his Chief of Staff, Sir Herbert Lawrence, with whom I had been closely associated in the final evacuation of Gallipoli. The conversation turned to Winston Churchill—now Minister of Munitions—and they were full of praise for the way in which he produced everything they wanted with amazing rapidity. The only reward he asked for, was for facilities to watch the effect of his munitions from the front line trenches. Someone then told stories of Churchill's brief command of the "Nth" Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. He was responsible, they said, for the most audacious raids, and was an excellent battalion commander; but it was lucky that the Prime Minister had got him out of the line before he was killed, or the Army would have lost a first-class Minister of Munitions.

Sir Douglas Haig said that I must return through the area which the British Army had captured, and he sent one of his A.D.C.s to accompany me, and himself planned out the route I was to take. We went first to the spot near Amiens, where the offensive opened, and then left-handed behind the battle towards the coast, passing great parks of captured German guns and dumps of ammunition. At one of these places, we met General Cadorna—the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army—who was on his way to see Sir Douglas. I was introduced to him and he was very friendly and complimentary on the work of the Dover Patrol; and was interested to hear that I had been in Italy three years as Naval Attaché.

We lunched with General Sir Charles Fergusson, commanding the 17th Corps, which was preparing for an attack, which was to be delivered the next day. Everyone I saw that day



appeared to be quite confident that we had the enemy beat. I returned to Dover that evening.

On 9th October, Sir William Robertson, now Commander-in-Chief of the Home Defences, arrived at Dover with his Chief of Staff—General Romer—to inspect the Garrison, and they, General Hickie and General Woollcombe, came to dine at Fleet House. We had an interesting and amusing evening.

I submitted—with great deference—exactly what I thought about keeping thousands of able-bodied troops in England, when they were so urgently required in France; though of course, I quite understood that as Commander-in-Chief of Home Defences, he did not like to part with them, etc., etc. I went on to say that the enemy was undoubtedly beaten; the Belgian coast would soon be in our hands, and it seemed folly to keep a man in England that was badly wanted in France or Flanders. General Robertson took it all in very good part, and no doubt shared my views, though he did not quite say so.

We had heard of a visit he had just paid to Harwich, where he turned all the troops out in the middle of the night, and not being too pleased with the result, had raised Cain. Dover expected to be treated to the same sort of thing, and when the Generals left at about 11 p.m., I accompanied them to the door—it was a lovely fine night—and I said: “Well good-night, General, I’m for bed. I suppose now, you will turn out the Garrison and shake them up until the morning, poor devils.” He answered: “No, Master Roger, now that you have won the War, I think we’ll all go to bed.” Much to Hickie’s amusement and the Garrison’s relief, for they were all standing by for a stormy night out.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### BELGIAN COAST OFFENSIVE RENEWED

*Offensive renewed; A reconnaissance; Land at Ostend; Withdraw under fire; Return after dark with King and Queen of Belgians; A German minefield; Land on Zeebrugge Mole; The Armistice.*

ON the 13th October—the eve of the new offensive—I wrote to Admiral Beatty, giving him the outline of the previous one, and told him that had the operation been dependent on the landing of a force, the disembarkation could not have taken place on a single day, during the Army's offensive, owing to bad weather.

I concluded: "I only wish we could do more, it is hateful to take a back seat, in the capture of the only sea ports within reach of the Navy. If they were only enemy ports, and did not contain thousands of Belgians, one could reduce Ostend to a Rhems in a few hours, with our 18-inch, 15-inch guns, etc., afloat, and our siege guns, which can all reach it; but the King has begged me to spare his 50,000 people in Ostend. As it is, we can only hope the enemy won't destroy Ostend. They have completed the blocking of it, with a paddle steamer and a tug, which all our salvage resources are standing by to clear. All this peace talk is dangerous, as it is affecting some of the French troops, who perhaps, not unnaturally, don't want to be killed on the eve of peace; particularly in the mud of that God-forsaken Flanders."

Meanwhile our monitors and C.M.B.s had been very active, and had kept the coast on the *qui vive*. Welman tried to destroy the minefield, which we knew had been laid off Ostend, by attempting to countermine it with depth charges; a very heroic, but not a very successful effort.

One of our C.M.B.s was missing one night, with a crew of three officers and two men, and a few days later, their bodies were washed ashore at La Panne. Welman thought that they had probably touched one of the navigation buoys near Dunkirk, while running at full speed, this would have been quite sufficient to rip open her fragile hull.

In view of the decision of the Belgian Headquarters, the help we were able to afford was rather limited; but we expended

an immense amount of ammunition as before, and in the meantime, I had sent for one of the great 800-foot lighters, built for the "Great Landing," and organised an armada of small craft and monitors to escort it; in order to mislead the enemy, and make them think that we were going to land.

The attack opened at dawn on the 14th October, and I hoisted my flag in the *Douglas*, but transferred it later to the *Termagant* (which drew much less water) when proceeding into waters which were liable to be mined, in order not to risk the deeper draught and more valuable destroyer unnecessarily.

It had been obvious for some days, that the enemy were preparing to evacuate Ostend, and the holding of troops to the coast in any numbers was probably impracticable; but the threat of a landing was made, with the lighter and its escort, which set out from Dunkirk Roads before dark on the 14th, having previously been somewhat "carelessly" exposed to the enemy's view. Our operations appear to have been successful, as the Belgian Headquarters reported that troops were moving towards the coast on the evening of the 14th, and they attributed this to our efforts.

Our bombardment, which commenced at 5.35 a.m. on the 14th, drew no reply from the enemy, and at 7.30 a.m., I proceeded up West Deep as far as Westende in the *Douglas*, with a division of T.B.D.s in company; a few salvoes were fired at the enemy's gun positions without drawing a reply. The Belgian Headquarters were anxious to ascertain, whether the enemy had evacuated the coast between Nieuport and Ostend, and General Degoutte asked me to carry out a reconnaissance that afternoon.

At 2 p.m. a force consisting of the *Gorgon*, screened by three T.B.D.s, *Termagant* flying my flag, proceeded through West Deep at 14 knots; followed at their utmost speed (eight knots) by the *Prince Eugene* and *Sir John Moore*, and smoke-making M.L.s. The ships opened fire on certain areas whilst advancing. The enemy withheld their fire until the *Gorgon* was off Westende—well inside the range of their batteries—when Tirpitz and all the guns near Raversyde opened fire. My official report records: "The force having achieved its object, withdrew under cover of a smoke-screen. Though at first the *Gorgon* was straddled, and fragments of shell fell on board her, the speed of the withdrawal evidently upset the accuracy of the enemy's fire." In fact, we nearly caught a Tartar, and it was very fortunate that

the *Gorgon* was handy and able to turn very quickly, and retire at 17 knots behind a heavy smoke-screen, which my three destroyers hastily laid across her wake. She was followed by salvo after salvo of Tirpitz 11-inch and shells of smaller calibre, which threw up great fountains of spray, higher than our mastheads.

It was fortunate that the enemy did not credit the *Gorgon* with a higher speed than the *Erebus* and *Terror*, which though a good deal faster than the old monitors, could only steam 12 knots. Luckily the old monitors had not come into range, but their M.L.s rushed up to add their smoke to that of the destroyers.

That evening I went ashore and learnt that the King and Queen and General Degoutte, had watched our reconnaissance from the sand dunes, and were thrilled with what Degoutte described as a "magnificent spectacle," although they had been rather anxious, having let me in for it. However, he now knew that the coastal batteries were still in working order, and he would not risk an advance within their range. I told him that he must not ask me to do "that funny thing again," it was not amusing being a cockshy, and having to run away.

The situation remained unchanged during the 15th and 16th, the enemy's coast batteries were occasionally active, and on the morning of the 15th Leugenboom bombarded Dunkirk—as it turned out—for the last time. That night the Raversyde batteries were silent. On the morning of the 17th October, the situation between Nieuport and Ostend was still obscure, and General Degoutte begged me to reconnoitre the coast once more; as they were anxious to advance in that area, and any reconnaissance by land was extremely difficult owing to the inundations, and aircraft could not detect anything unless the enemy were actually in movement.

I therefore proceeded at high water in the *Termagant*, with three other destroyers in company, and some aircraft overhead; and in order to draw the batteries' fire before we got into too dangerous a range, we advanced two or three miles at a time and then altered 16 points, turning again to the eastward when I was satisfied that the enemy was not going to open fire. The last time we turned, we were very close to the Raversyde guns, and one of my Staff drew a long breath and said: "Now we are for it, Sir!" but nothing happened, and after a few minutes we turned again, and then noticed that our aeroplanes were

looping the loop over Ostend, and one planed down and landed on the beach—incidentally he crashed against a groyne and smashed his machine, but he had the honour of being the first of the Allies to enter Ostend.

As we got closer, we could see Belgian flags flying, so I steamed up towards the entrance, relying on our shallow draught to take us over the mines, but fortunately (as it turned out) a boat with some Belgian fishermen had come out to warn us and shouted : " Mines, Mines ! " so we went astern in our tracks, until they said we were clear, and then anchored. Before landing at 11 a.m. I signalled to the Commodore at Dunkirk, to telephone to King Albert, to say that I was sending a destroyer to Dunkirk, as I thought that he and the Queen would like to go to Ostend at once ; I hoped in this way to enable them to be the first Belgians to land there.

Tomkinson, Godfrey, Morgan and I then got into a whaler and pulled in past the *Vindictive*, which was crowded with children waving Belgian, British and French flags. (We were told an enterprising German had sold them a few hours before they left.) The quays were crowded with people, who were shouting and waving a welcome, but all the landing places were unapproachable, as they were covered with barbed wire ; eventually we found a perpendicular iron ladder, and I climbed up it. Directly my head appeared, I was kissed by a man with three days' growth, who had been eating garlic, and as I was still on the ladder, I could not defend myself from him. When we got on to the quay, we were surrounded by a friendly, excited crowd, but one Belgian woman rushed up and begged us to go away at once, as she said that there were still Germans in the town with " mitrailleuses," and she was so afraid that we might be captured.

At that moment two shells fell about 50 yards away, evidently someone in the town had telephoned to the batteries on the coast to the eastward, that the British had landed. I shouted to the people to go away and take cover, and that we would soon return. There were some German shelters near, and they soon disappeared.

Meantime Hamilton Benn had arrived with four M.L.s, and was lying close inshore, where he was not likely to draw fire, so I left him in charge, with orders to get into touch with the Belgians after dark, and report on the situation.

As we were pulling out, salvos of 12-inch were falling round the destroyers in the Roads, and they were getting under way.

Directly we got on board we went full speed to the westward, to get out of range, the *Termagant* bringing up the rear. One well calibrated salvo of four 12-inch dropped a few yards ahead of us, having come directly over the bridge, and we went through the waterspout they threw up, which drenched the ship fore and aft, but we were not damaged. I was told afterwards that the Captain of the destroyer next ahead, said: "That's the end of the *Termagant*!" When we ran out of range, Knocke battery began to search the roads approaching Ostend from Nieuport, evidently expecting a Belgian advance.

As soon as I got on board, I signalled to Dunkirk cancelling my message to the King, but he and the Queen had already arrived, and were waiting for me in the Commodore's office, when I got there. I told their Majesties, that I was very sorry, I could not take them to Ostend, as the German batteries to the eastward of Ostend were still manned, and evidently in telephonic communication with Germans still in the town. My landing had drawn fire on the town and endangered the people, and the destroyers had been shelled out of the Roads.

They then said that if I would not take them in a destroyer, they would go in an aeroplane. I said they simply could not fly, the only aeroplane of ours that had tried to land, had come to grief on the groynes, and as they knew, the beach was not a safe landing place. They were very disappointed and unhappy and continued to press me. At length I gave in, and said that if they would come away the moment I thought it necessary, I would take them on shore; if I received a report from Benn, that there were no more Germans in the town. They promised to do everything I asked them, if I would only take them there.

Towards dusk we embarked in the *Termagant*, and hoisted the Belgian flag at the main (which the signalman had hastily made), and with my flag at the fore, we steamed up the coast, so as to arrive off Westende at nightfall. On the way we passed the monitors, which had been out in their firing position, covering our advance, and seeing the Belgian flag at the main, they manned ship and cheered as we passed.

We anchored off Middelkerke, where Hamilton Benn met us in his M.L., and reported that all was quiet in Ostend and

the Germans had left. We transferred to his M.L., and taking the *Termagant's* whaler in tow, went on in her, as I did not wish to draw the enemy's fire again, and they had paid no attention to the M.L.s so far. As it was dead low water, in view of the Belgian fishermen's warning, we transferred to the whaler before we got to the minefield, and then pulled in to the iron ladder we had used before; but it was now a very long, muddy and slippery climb, and though the King and Queen managed it very well, their A.D.C. slipped into the water and got very wet.

Ostend was pitch dark—the Germans having destroyed the electric light plant before they left—and the quays were apparently deserted, but we had not gone far through the streets, before someone recognised the King, and the news spread like wildfire. By the time we got to the Hotel de Ville, we were surrounded by a large crowd, and had to almost fight our way in, and the door was slammed behind us. We found a number of people—the city council I suppose—drinking champagne to celebrate the German withdrawal, the only light being from candles stuck in bottles. The Burgomaster had gone home already, they told us, but his Deputy made a speech of welcome. They were astounded to see the King and Queen walk in, and it was all very moving and exciting, but I was beginning to get very anxious, in case there were any spies left in the town, and the telephone to the batteries was still working; so after about 20 minutes, I reminded the King and Queen of their promise, and we started our return journey, surrounded by a jubilant and enthusiastic crowd. Tomkinson, Godfrey, Hamilton Benn, the A.D.C., and I, linked arms, to keep the crowd off the King and Queen, as they were all pressing round to shake hands, which was delaying matters considerably.

I was very glad when we got them safely into the boat and on board the M.L., and it was an immense relief when we ran alongside the *Termagant* off Westende. About an hour after we left Ostend, Knocke again fired a number of salvoes into the Roads, and when I told the Queen, she said: "What a pity we left so soon."

We had two C.M.B.s in attendance, and as the King and Queen were in a hurry to get back, I called one alongside and we embarked in her; it was not very easy embarking, and the

A.D.C. slipped overboard again. After pulling him in, we went off at 40 knots ; the King and Queen and I sitting on the torpedo platform, and the very wet A.D.C. further aft. I told the other C.M.B. to keep us in sight, but it was very dark and we lost sight of her in a few minutes.

About half-way to Dunkirk, the engine seized up, and we lay stopped and fired all our Very lights, but they were not seen. In fact the commanding officer had got well off his course to seaward, in his anxiety to run no risk of hitting a buoy. Anyhow, there we were drifting, fortunately towards Calais, for about an hour, well outside the track we were expected to have gone by, and with nothing in sight. It was quite calm, and we were all very happy, so nothing mattered. We talked about everything under the sun. We had heard that morning in the Press wireless message, that the Crown Prince of Germany had been murdered, while escaping out of Germany. The Queen remarked : "I find that terrible, killed coming into one's country, yes, but murdered escaping from it, no." I said something about our having won the War at last, and that I had never doubted for a moment that we would do so. The Queen replied : "I also, but I often wondered how."

Eventually another C.M.B. found us. It was not too easy transferring to her in the slight swell, and the A.D.C. fell overboard for the third time that evening, but it did not worry the King and Queen in the least, though I was very apologetic, and said that I wished we had stayed in the *Termagant*. The King said : "No, we have never been in a C.M.B. before, and now we have been in two." As we were nearing Dunkirk, they both thanked me very much for taking them to Ostend, and giving them such a wonderful experience, and the Queen said to the King : "Albert, I find that we could only do such things with our Admiral." They were so charming to me and grateful ; but it was an enormous relief to me to get them back safely ; and I have often thought since with horror, of the risks we ran that night.

The anxiety of Tomkinson and everyone in the *Termagant* can be imagined, when they got to Dunkirk, where we ought to have arrived half an hour before them, and there was no sign of us. Everything that could move had been sent out to look for us.



The next morning (18th October) I went to Ostend in the *Termagant*, with one British and two French destroyers in company, with the object of reconnoitring towards Zeebrugge at high water, preceded by minesweepers. On arrival off Ostend, Hamilton Benn told me that the Knocke battery had shelled Ostend Roads again early that morning, the last bombardment corresponding with an attempt to inspect the minefield with M.L.s at low water. I therefore sent the destroyers back to Middelkerke, and transferred to his M.L., in order to enter the harbour. Before the destroyers could be withdrawn, Knocke opened fire on them, and continued to follow them until they were out of range.

I called on the Burgomaster of Ostend, and learnt, in the course of conversation, that there was some slight feeling against the British, amongst a section of the inhabitants, due to the damage caused by bombs and gunfire. He said that the damage done to the town was slight, serious damage being entirely confined to the vicinity of the docks and harbour, and a suburb near Tirpitz battery, and the resentment had undoubtedly been engineered by the Germans. Finding that the inhabitants were very short of milk for the children, owing to all the cows having been removed by the Germans, I arranged for a supply of tinned milk to be sent from naval stocks at Dunkirk at once, and told the Burgomaster that it was a present to the inhabitants from the British Navy. Later the Admiralty authorised it, and sent a further gift of milk and flour from Deptford, which I think removed any ill feeling there might have been.

I thought it would be a good thing for the Burgomaster and the Ostend Authorities to know that the King and Queen had lived in a little villa, within gun range of the enemy all through the War, and incidentally, that the damage inflicted on Ostend, was infinitely less than that suffered by the inhabitants of Dunkirk. So I asked the King if he would receive the Burgomaster and his officials at La Panne, if I sent them to Dunkirk in a destroyer. When he agreed, I asked the Burgomaster if he would like to pay his respects to the King and Queen at La Panne, which of course he was delighted to do. I then shipped him and his people off to Dunkirk, having arranged for them to be driven through the most devastated areas to La Panne, where by chance they had to wait a bit, until the King, who was flying, landed and received them.

Meanwhile civil engineers from the Admiralty had been landed at Ostend to make arrangements for the repair of the harbour works, etc., and we set to work to clear up the harbour.

On the morning of the 19th October, I intended to take the *Termagant* to reconnoitre the coast to the eastward at high water, accompanied by the French destroyer *Lestin*, the destroyers being preceded by tunnel minesweepers; the shallowest draught vessels we possessed. We had just got under way, when the paddle sweeper *Plumpton*, engaged in sweeping the minefield at the top of high water, struck a mine and had to be beached east of Ostend pier in a sinking condition. This accident caused considerable delay, and I considered it inadvisable to proceed in the destroyers on a falling tide, so embarked in a C.M.B. and invited the Captain of the *Lestin* and Hamilton Benn to accompany me, and with my Staff in another C.M.B., we proceeded towards Zeebrugge, missing a horned mine, which was awash, by about two feet while going about 30 knots.

An air reconnaissance during the forenoon had reported that the coast east of Ostend had been abandoned by the enemy, and later that Belgian soldiers had been seen on Zeebrugge Mole at 1 p.m. Unfortunately this information did not reach me, but on hearing it, my friend Captain Boisanger got into a seaplane and piloted two French M.L.s into the harbour, while I was occupied with our troubles in the minefield. He was full of apologies for having wiped my eye, when I met him on the Mole at Zeebrugge, as I had made such a point of bringing the French vessels into everything I undertook; except the destroyer reconnaissance on the 17th October, the risks of which I did not like to ask them to share. Boisanger had been such a charming and loyal supporter, that I assured him that I did not grudge him the honour of being the first to land at Zeebrugge. By that time it was nearly dark, but we could see that the Germans had destroyed their temporary bridge across C3's gap in the viaduct, and all the guns, machinery and cranes on the Mole. I left Boisanger and his M.L.s there, and returned to Dunkirk, in order to telephone to the Admiralty.

The next few days off Ostend were a nightmare. On the 20th, I motored from Dunkirk, through Pervyse across the Yser to Ostend. When well behind the German lines, the roads were excellent, and we were bowling along at about

50 miles an hour, when the driver, not noticing a slight by-pass made to avoid it, drove us into a ditch across the road, the culvert of which had been destroyed by the Germans. We were a bit shaken and cut, but no one was really hurt, and a Belgian General, following in another car, took us on to Ostend; and the Air Force Transport salvaged and repaired the car. I signalled to Dunkirk for a destroyer to fetch me that evening, and told the *Terror*, which was lying off Ostend, to send in a boat to fetch me. As it was getting dark and no boat arrived, I asked Hamilton Benn—whose M.L.s were lying in the harbour—to send me out in his dinghy and three of my Staff, two men and I, set out in it, to find to our surprise a very heavy swell running outside the harbour.

As we approached the Roads, we could see monitor *M21*, in the beams of a searchlight, slowly sinking, and her crew being taken off in boats. I went alongside her just before she was finally abandoned and sank, and heard that she had struck a mine. I then sent the dinghy back, after transferring to a cutter, which took me to my destroyer.

Meanwhile Benn went through an anxious time, when his dinghy did not return, and he realised that there was a nasty sea running outside. Two hours later, the men arrived independently, wet through, and each reported that the dinghy had capsized on their way back, that he had swum ashore, and that he feared that the other man had been drowned.

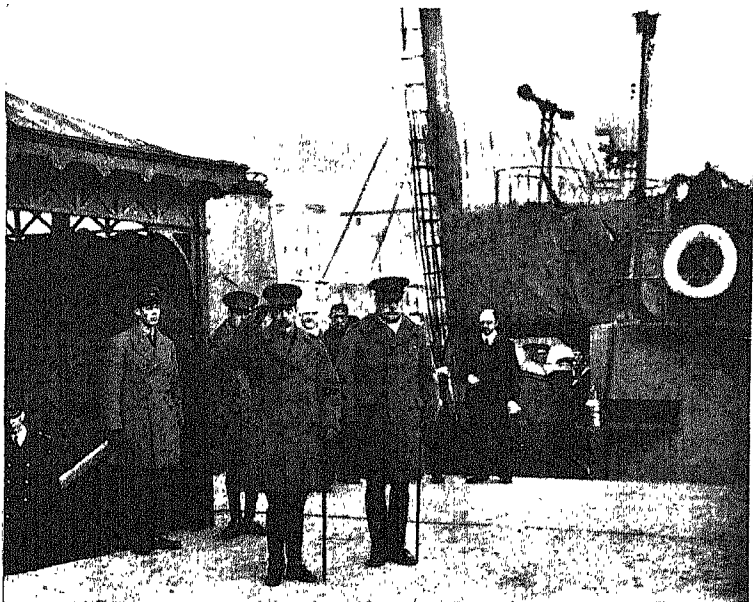
The Ostend minefield was an appalling one. It was evident after the *Plumpton's* experience, that the paddle minesweepers drew too much water to sweep, even at high water. The little tunnel minesweepers could make no impression on the mine moorings, which were exceptionally strong, and on the morning of the 21st, while *ML561* was trying to sink floating mines by gunfire, she struck a submerged mine and sank.

I then ordered all operations on the minefield to cease, and asked the Admiralty to send their experts to deal with it. This minefield was undoubtedly laid by the enemy as a counter to any further attempt to block Ostend, an operation which would necessarily have had to be carried out about high water, and in view of the strength of the moorings, which resisted any cutters, I think it was fortunate that the Admiralty put a stop to my third attempt.



THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS AND PRINCE LEOPOLD  
RIDING INTO BRUGES

General Dégoutte, Sir Roger Keyes, Lord Athlone following



THE KING, THE PRINCE OF WALES, PRINCE ALBERT, SIR DOUGLAS  
HAIG AND SIR ROGER KEYES AT BOULOGNE

18TH NOVEMBER, 1918



The King of the Belgians invited me to ride into Bruges with him and the Queen, when he led his Army into the town, on the morning of 25th October. I rode with Lord Athlone and General Degoutte, immediately behind the King and Queen and Crown Prince. The latter had left Eton to take part in the ceremony, and had had a great send-off from the Eton boys.

We rode through crowds of cheering people, and when we reached the square, the King wheeled round and the weary war-worn troops marched past him; the bells of Bruges ringing a ceaseless peal of jubilation all the time. We then went into the Hotel de Ville, and the old Burgomaster read an address of welcome in a shaky voice. It was a wonderful scene, and everyone was intensely moved.

I stayed in Bruges that night, and was greatly touched by the friendliness of the Burgomaster and the City Fathers, who were at great pains to do me honour; and told me that our attack had altered the whole atmosphere in Bruges and indeed in Flanders; coming at a black hour, it had renewed their faith that Great Britain would see them through in the end.

They were very appreciative of our efforts not to damage Belgian property in our air raids, and declared that the damage we had inflicted was confined to areas occupied by the German Naval and Air Forces.

I was told that one of the amusements of the Belgian children was to act a pantomime of the Kaiser bestowing decorations on Admiral von Schröder and the defenders of Zeebrugge, which apparently caused the Belgians much amusement.

I was back in Dover when the Armistice was signed at 11 a.m. on 11th November, and like elsewhere, everyone was almost delirious with excitement and relief, that after four long years the War was over at last. Crowds marched up and down the sea front cheering, and every ship in the harbour blew its siren for nearly half an hour, and to add to the din the Marine orderlies brought out a big bell that had been brought back from Zeebrugge Mole, and, propping it up on a cart, clanged it under my office window, so that we could hardly hear ourselves speak, in the general rejoicing.

Thus ended four years and three months of a terrible war, in which more than a dozen Nations had been involved, and which had caused untold misery and suffering, besides the loss of millions of lives.

## CHAPTER XXX

### AFTER THE ARMISTICE

The Duke of Connaught's visit; An Allied Commission; State Entry into Brussels; Return to Dover; Submarine Graveyard; Flight to see German submarines at Harwich; The King visits France; The Generals return to England; President Wilson arrives; Tour of Battlefields; Presentation of D.S.C. to Dunkirk; Appointment to Battle Cruisers; Scapa again; Visit to Aberdeen; The Victory March; The Baltic; Dover Memorial; Visit to Laeken; Appointed Deputy Chief of Naval Staff; Difficulties with Air Ministry; Washington Treaty; Lausanne; Zeebrugge Memorial.

EARLY in November, Colonel Malcolm Murray—the Duke of Connaught's Controller—told me that H.R.H. was very anxious to see the Belgian coast, and asked me if I could arrange a visit; so he came to lunch at Fleet House and I took him over in a destroyer to Dunkirk on 13th November. We stayed on board the *Erebus* for a couple of nights, and from there we visited the ports and several of the coast batteries, and the Duke was very interested in the huge brass cartridge cases the Germans used for the 15-inch and 12-inch guns. In Knocke battery, there were a number of used cartridge cases lying by the guns, which were evidently those that had been fired at us during the last days before the evacuation. The Duke asked me to have a cartridge case sent to him, as a memento of his visit, and I kept one myself, which I had mounted as a gong.

A few days later the Admiralty directed me to take charge of an Allied Naval Mission, consisting of Rear-Admiral Bristol, U.S.N., Captain Boisanger, and Lieutenant Vignanoni, Italian Navy, to see that the terms of the Armistice were carried out in the waterways of Belgium. We motored up through the principal towns and villages to Antwerp, where we happened to be when the King and Queen drove in to receive a welcome from the city. I arranged for our Mission to be in Brussels to witness the State entry on the 22nd November. We arrived the evening before and went to the Hotel de Ville to pay our respects to Burgomaster Max, whose stouthearted defiance of the Germans had landed him in a German prison, but who had

now returned to his office. He was most friendly, and said that we must witness the ceremony from a room in the Hotel de Ville.

As we were going out, I met one of the King's A.D.C.s, who remarked, in passing, that the horse I had ridden into Bruges would be waiting for me at the Flanders gate, by which the King would enter the next morning. He was very surprised to hear that I knew nothing at all about it. He then told me that for the last four days they had been telegraphing, first to Dover and then all over Belgium to find me, and he thought one of the messages must have reached me, as I had arrived in Brussels; he said the Germans had destroyed all the telegraph and telephone systems during their retreat, and they had taken some time to restore.

I did not get the message until I returned to Dover; however, thanks to a happy chance, I had the great honour of riding into Brussels behind the King and Queen and the Princes—Prince Charles in the uniform of a British Naval Cadet. We rode at the head of the Belgian Army, followed by a British, French and American battalion, through the streets up to the Chamber of Deputies, amid a storm of cheers and waving handkerchiefs. We then dismounted and went in, and the King read a speech, in the course of which he paid a very warm tribute to the British Navy.

A great many British soldiers, who had been prisoners of war, had been released by the Germans, without any facilities for getting home, and were marching back from Germany, footsore, weary and hungry; many arrived in Brussels while we were there, and they received a most friendly welcome from the Belgians. I saw many affectionate greetings, and one young red-headed Highlander looked very embarrassed, when he was warmly embraced by a pretty Belgian girl.

On my return to Dover there was much to be arranged, thousands of mines to be swept up, and a hundred and one things to see to. A great many men in the Auxiliary Patrol wanted to be demobilised at once, in order to return to their shore jobs, which of course was not possible. Men who had faced death daily, minesweeping during the War, naturally enough were not the least interested in sweeping up the mines



after the War was over. However, I only had one case of insubordination, and I went on board the sweeper at once, and told the ship's company, that I considered it a point of honour for the Navy, to see that no soldier crossing from France ran any risk of being blown up on a mine; they then turned to again and I had no more trouble.

There were a few cases of troops refusing to do duty, and on one occasion a body of men marching through the streets of Dover, were collected by the Mayor (Mr. Edwin Farley),\* taken into the Town Hall and given tea, and after starting them singing the old War songs, "Tipperary," etc., concluding with "Pack up your Troubles," he spoke to them and told them to be good boys and not to spoil the wonderful record of the British Army by giving trouble now. They gave him three hearty cheers and the trouble was over.

The disposition of the Barrage light vessels and the vessels patrolling the deep minefield, on 11th November, 1918, are illustrated (*see* plan). It also shows the positions of the German submarines, which were definitely identified as having been sunk in it since 19th December, 1917 (the night it was first illuminated) and its vicinity in 1918; and also the numbers of the German submarines (based on German information) which are believed to have been destroyed in the deep minefield, but which were not definitely identified by us; the total amounting to 19 altogether.

It was a great relief to me to be able to pay off the barrage vessels and recall the fishing craft from patrol, before the winter set in. The thought of the hardships the crews had endured during the previous winter months, and would have to face in the coming winter gales, and the risks that they would run during the long dark nights, within such easy striking distance of the enemy's base, had been constantly with me.

I had at first hoped to be able to replace the patrol with the tower system, before the winter was upon us, but there were many delays and the construction of the towers was so slow and behindhand that none were actually ready before the

\* Mr. Farley was Mayor of Dover for six years in succession, including the whole War, and he received a knighthood for his services, which gave great pleasure, not only to Dover, but to every soldier and sailor who had come in contact with him.

Armistice ; though some would have been in place before the winter was over, had the War continued.

The destruction of *UB109* had proved that the loop system could not only detect, but destroy, submarines, and I was very anxious that a tower should be tried out ; so the Admiralty arranged for one to be placed in the position of the Nab lightship, in the eastern approaches to Spithead. The tower was designed to be laid in much deeper water, so it stands a good deal higher than we intended—but there it is still, after 17 years, a beacon to mariners, and an unrecognised memorial (for few people know its origin) to the Submarine Barrage Committee, whose recommendations had the effect of stopping an unrestricted procession of German submarines through the Straits of Dover, to their killing grounds in the Channel and further afield.

The Naval Intelligence Department placed the following statement on record at the end of the War :

“The principal enemy with which the Dover Patrol has had to deal has been the submarine.

The passage of these through a channel 21 miles wide, peculiarly subject to strong currents, fogs and bad weather, is exceedingly difficult to prevent. Since the beginning of the year, the measures have been steadily improved, and reached their maximum efficiency in September last (1918), with the result that the Flanders Submarine Flotilla abandoned all attempts to pass the Straits, and were for the first time in the War compelled to go round the north of Scotland.

The operations at Dover have in this current year destroyed at least 18 submarines.”

This is borne out by Vice-Admiral Andreas Michelsen in his book “*Der U-Bootskrieg, 1914-1918*,” who admits that the mines, the flares, the searchlights and the patrol craft were an unpleasant surprise.

We know, too, from official German sources that, after the loss of *U109*, in January, 1918, all the German submarines from the Heligoland Bight were ordered to use the North of Scotland route, and this considerably lengthened the time occupied in going to and fro to their hunting ground. Also

that the German High Naval Command recalled a part of the Flanders Flotilla to Germany early in June.

This they said was done because the submarine Commanders were reporting that the passage of the Dover Straits had become increasing difficult and hazardous, and they wished to open a new zone of operations on the East Coast of England.

Judging by the aerial photographs showing the congested state of Bruges, another reason was, no doubt, that although they could of course use the Mole outer harbour at Zeebrugge and the small submarine shelter there—which only held two or three submarines—they could no longer go freely in and out by the canal to their safe shelter in Bruges, or make full use of their base there. Moreover, Ostend Base was exposed to our shell fire, and only the smallest submarines could use the canal. Therefore, when those that were out cruising returned, it is not surprising that some of them were recalled from Flanders to Germany. Though, no doubt, if our blockships had not been in the Bruges Canal, and Ostend had not been frequently bombarded, they would have continued to find the Flanders bases more convenient for operating against the trade on the East Coast; particularly that making for the Thames and Humber, as the entrance to the Thames is 150 miles, the Humber is 80 miles, and even the Tyne is 40 miles, closer to Zeebrugge than the nearest German base in the Ems.

I think that we can claim, without any question, that the measures we took in 1918, to prevent the Heligoland Bight and Flanders submarines passing through the Straits of Dover into the Channel, were effective almost at once, and completely stopped their passage within nine months.

One day Tyrwhitt, who had some flying boats in his command, flew over to lunch with us and took me back with him to see the surrendered German submarines—122 in all—which were lying, secured in threes and fours, up the river at Harwich. After flying over them we landed, and I had a look at the various types, from the little “U.B.” and “U.C.” boats, to the great ocean cruisers mounting six-inch guns.

The German submarines were taken over by our Submarine Service, and were inspected before the German crews were allowed to leave, to make certain that they had left no booby

traps behind them. I was told that one of our Petty Officers, having completed his inspection with a German Petty Officer, pointed to the boat alongside, and said, "There's your boat, buzz off." The German, who showed signs of emotion, made a nasty noise in his throat and spat into the sea, saying: "That for your Beatty," and again, "That for your Jellicoe." The Petty Officer said: "All right, Fritz, that will do. I quite understand your feelings, but don't you dare to spit into *our sea* again."

By the time I had finished my inspection it was dark, so I returned to Dover in the *Termagant*.

On the 27th November, the King went to France, accompanied by the Prince of Wales and Prince Albert, to visit the Army, and I accompanied him in the *Broke* with an escort of destroyers, C.M.B.s and "Blimps." We landed at Boulogne, where we were met by Sir Douglas Haig, who took us to lunch at the Military Club.

Later the King and the Princes stayed at a chateau near Bruges (in which the Kaiser was staying when we attacked Zeebrugge and Ostend) and the King told me to show him the sights of the Belgian Coast. I motored round with him for two days, visiting Bruges, Zeebrugge, Ostend and the principal German batteries. The morning that we visited Zeebrugge, the King of the Belgians motored down from Brussels and accompanied us, and they asked me to tell them all about our attack. After looking at the blockships in the canal, we walked down the Mole, over a swinging temporary bridge made by the Belgians, to look at the place where the *Vindictive* had been, and inspected the guns at the end of the Mole, which had all been blown up by the Germans.

The Naval Base at Bruges was an amazing place. Numerous workshops had been installed with immense concrete roofs, capable of withstanding the heaviest bombs. The first submarine shelter had been destroyed by one of our heavy bombs, but the new shelters were enormous structures (*see* page 230), the great cement pillars being built on wooden piles, like the palaces of Venice. The roof was 11 feet thick and a 600-lb. bomb had made no impression on it. Some millions of pounds' worth of timber was lying beside the canal, to make new shelters, we were told, and there can be no doubt that Germany meant

to retain the Belgian ports and Bruges, their inland base after the War, as a constant threat to London and its approaches.

On the way back from Boulogne on the 12th December, the King gave me the K.C.V.O., saying that, as I was now a Knight Commander of the Bath, he would like me to be a Knight of his own order; which gracious remark enhanced its value to me by a hundred per cent.

After the Armistice, I was made an honorary Freeman of Dover, Chatham and later of Folkestone, and they each gave me a handsome silver casket; while the Mayor of Dover also presented my wife with an enamel brooch of the arms of Dover surrounded by rubies, as a memento of her war work in Dover. Lord Northcliffe was at the luncheon before the ceremony, and hearing the Mayor express a wish to raise a cairn on the cliffs above Dover and another at Gris Nez, to commemorate the work of the Dover Patrol, he undertook to collect a large sum of money, on condition that a third memorial should be erected in America. This offer the Mayor gladly accepted, with the result that *The Times* proceeded to appeal for subscriptions day after day and week after week, with a ceaseless eulogy of the Dover Patrol, which I was quite unable to stop. My protests were ignored; I was told that Lord Northcliffe had given orders; he was abroad and no letters were being forwarded. I was filled with shame and felt that I could never look a soldier in the face again; however, I need not have worried, as the Mayor told me later, that a very large proportion of the money subscribed, came from the Army in France!

On the 19th December, Sir Douglas Haig, his Staff and the Army Commanders were to receive a welcome in London, and lunch with the King at Buckingham Palace. His Majesty sent me a message to say, that I was to see that they arrived in London not later than 1 p.m. Generals Byng and Birdwood, who were on leave in England, came down to stay with us at Dover the day before, in order to meet their Chief on his arrival there.

I went off in the small hours of the 19th in the *Termagant* to Boulogne, to fetch Sir Douglas Haig and the Generals, but by that time it was blowing a north-westerly gale, and a very heavy sea was surging into Boulogne harbour. The *Termagant* yawed so badly running before the sea, when approaching the harbour, that there would have been a great risk of her running into one

side or the other if we had attempted to enter, so I told Commander Cunningham to anchor under the lea of the western breakwater, and I went in in the pilot boat, which had come out to warn us, that it would be dangerous to attempt to enter the harbour.

By the time the Generals arrived, I had commandeered the *Jean Braddyl*, a Belgian Ostend-Dover packet boat, the best and most powerful transport we possessed. Having made the Generals as comfortable as possible on board, we then went to sea in the teeth of a howling gale—followed by the *Termagant*—and the Captain made for Folkestone by the swept route, intending to go from there to Dover by the swept coastal channel; but the sea was so heavy that we made no progress, steaming head into it, and I soon realised that there was no earthly chance of getting the Generals to London by 1 p.m. by that route, even if I made a wireless for a special train from Folkestone, and landed them there. So after asking the Captain how much water the *Jean Braddyl* drew, and learning that it was less than the draught of the trawlers, which had spent some months on the deep minefield (we lost two out of 66), I told the Captain to steer straight for Dover over the minefield, as it was nearly high water. He was a splendid fellow, and though he looked somewhat astonished he made no difficulty, and steered straight for Dover at his utmost speed.

The wind and sea were now broad on our port bow, and though we rolled heavily and very uncomfortably, we made good speed. We saw a few floating mines, but were able to avoid them; and in any case, drifting mines are not really very dangerous to a ship under way on a steady course, as the bow wave throws them off. We thus made up for lost time and arrived punctually in the submarine harbour at Dover, to be received by a Guard of Honour of Bluejackets and Marines.

General Byng chaffed me about the risks I had run with the Generals and remarked, that I was evidently trying to give rapid promotion in the higher ranks of the Army. To which I answered that I had not asked them to take any risks that the trawlers had not been subjected to for the past year, and that I had promised the King that the Generals should not be late for lunch, and there was no other way of getting them there in time.

I had arranged for all the open motors I could raise to be in waiting, and having handed Sir Douglas Haig over to the Mayor, and put the mace-bearer alongside my chauffeur, I sent them in triumph round Dover to the station, while I went across by boat and saw them off from there.

On the 26th December, many soldiers and sailors were recalled from leave to line the streets, form escorts and guards of honour (and the first Christmas after four years of war was thoroughly upset) in order to do honour to President Wilson, who chose that day to arrive in England. I was told to go over to Calais to fetch him, and the Duke of Connaught came down to meet him at Dover. After a brief visit to Buckingham Palace, he returned to France on New Year's Eve.

At the end of January I made a tour of the Western Front with Admiral Sir Stanley Colville and other officers. We visited most of the famous battlefields, and were amazed at the strength of the Hindenburg Line, and other positions which had been taken by our splendid Army in fighting their way back to Mons—the starting point of 1914. We stayed at Cologne, where there was a flotilla of motor launches patrolling the Rhine, and came back by the Menin road, and saw the wrecks of a score of tanks which had foundered in the mud of that God-forsaken area of desolation.

One day after we returned, I went over to Zeebrugge in the *Trident* and met Cardinal Mercier, who had motored down from Louvain to see me; he was most charming and friendly, and came to lunch with me on board.

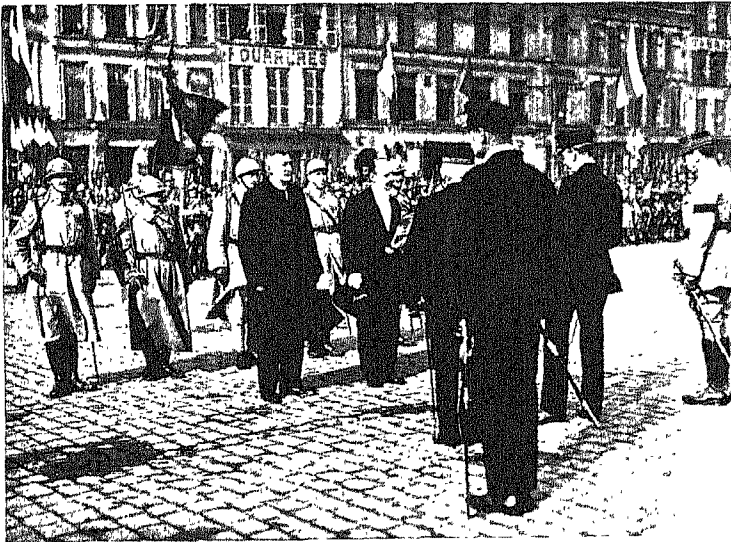
On the 19th February, I was invited by the Mother Superior to visit the English Convent at Bruges, which had been there for some generations. I was told that the last male visitor was the Prince Consort, who went there with Queen Victoria. The Mother Superior told me that when our attack opened on St. George's Eve, she rang the bell and called out all the nuns, and they went down to the chapel and prayed for our success, and for the passing of the souls of our men. They gave me a most warlike souvenir (made by their blacksmith) in the form of an inkpot, covered by a helmet and supported on crossed spears, with a shield with the lion of Belgium upon it, inscribed with the date of my visit.

Many of my soldier and sailor friends passed through Dover



ARRIVAL OF GENERALS AT DOVER AFTER ARMISTICE  
19TH DECEMBER, 1918

Generals Travers Clarke, Fowke, Horne, Lawrence, Plumer, Rawlinson, Haig



SIR ROGER KEYES PRESENTING D.S.C. TO DUNKIRK  
18TH MARCH, 1919

Admiral Ronarc'h, Commodore Larken, Sir Roger Keyes, General Pauffin de  
St. Marcel





on their way to visit the battlefields, including Sir George Callaghan, Sir David Beatty and Commodore Hubert Brand, who stayed a night at Fleet House ; and also General Sir Hubert Gough, who stayed for a few days and visited the Belgian Coast with me.

After the Armistice we gave up the St. Margaret's bungalow and brought our children in to Fleet House, and on 14th March my second son Roger was born there.

On the 18th March, I went to Dunkirk to present the Distinguished Service Cross, which the King had conferred on that town for its great services to the British Navy ; and in recognition of the courage and fortitude displayed by its inhabitants, who carried on their ordinary life, undismayed by the losses they suffered from the 15-inch shells of Leugenboom, and the bombs of frequent air raids. No less than 7,500 bombs and projectiles had fallen into the town, causing more than 1,600 casualties.

On arrival in the square at Dunkirk, accompanied by Commodore Larken, Admiral Ronarc'h and General Pauflin de St. Maruel, I was received by a Guard of Honour of French troops and a French Naval detachment. Standing under the statue of Jean Bart, I pinned the D.S.C. on a blue velvet cushion carried by the Mayor. I thought of Jean Bart, the intrepid French corsair and privateer who had inflicted great losses on British shipping in his time, and I felt that he must be looking down with friendly amusement at a British Admiral doing honour to his birthplace. After the ceremony, the Mayor presented me with a silver medal, inscribed as from : " La Ville de Dunkerque à l'Amiral Keyes."

Meanwhile, I had been appointed to command the Battle Cruiser Force, which nominally consisted of two battle cruiser squadrons, a cruiser squadron, and a destroyer flotilla ; but when I actually relieved Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Oliver at Rosyth on 21st March, it had been reduced to one squadron of battle cruisers. Admiral Oliver had been flying his flag in the *Renown*, and I proceeded in her to Scapa Flow, where I transferred my flag to the *Lion*, now commanded by Captain Wilfred Tomkinson. The *Lion*, *Renown*, *Princess Royal* and *Tiger* were acting as guard ships to the German Fleet, which

consisted of five battle cruisers, the ten latest battleships, eight new cruisers, and 50 of the latest destroyers. The new battle cruiser *Hindenburg* and the battleships *Baden* and *Bayern*, mounting 15-inch guns (the answer to the *Queen Elizabeth*) were the finest fighting ships in the world; and nearly all the cruisers and many of the destroyers had joined the High Sea Fleet since Jutland. These splendid fighting ships, manned by unruly, mutinous crews and a few unhappy officers, were a most distressing spectacle. The surrender of the German Fleet was surely the most shameful and contemptible episode in the whole maritime history of the world; a humiliation from which, one would think, a nation would take generations to recover.

However, not only have the Germans now built a number of powerful modern ships and manned them with very efficient and well-disciplined crews, but they annually celebrate "their fight to escape annihilation" on that most inglorious First of June as a great naval victory!

All the German submarines were unconditionally surrendered under the terms of the Armistice, but the Fleet at Scapa Flow was, so to speak, in pawn. After they had hauled down their colours and had been inspected to see that they had no ammunition or wireless apparatus on board, we had no jurisdiction whatever over them, other than to see that their crews remained on board their ships; which were to lie in Scapa Flow during the Armistice, until their fate was determined in the Treaty of Peace. Armed trawlers and drifters patrolled round the German Fleet, and a vessel came periodically from Germany to bring food for the ship's companies. Except for an officer on my Staff, who visited Admiral Reuter daily, to find out if he had any requests or complaints to make, we had no communication with the ships.

A few days after I arrived, Admiral Reuter sent me a message, to beg that he might be allowed to transfer from his flagship to the cruiser *Emden*, whose ship's company, he said, were not so offensively mutinous as his own. He also reported some cases of gross insubordination, which I felt could not be tolerated, so I approved of the transfer, and said that if he would like to sentence the ringleaders to 90 days' imprisonment, and would sign the warrants, which I sent him, I would execute them—a thoroughly irregular proceeding, as I was of course informed later. But in the meantime the men went to Perth

Military Gaol, completed their sentences and returned thoroughly chastened.

I learnt by side-winds that the Germans actually thought that their ships would be restored to them by the Peace Treaty ; as this was obviously out of the question, I took steps to organise a force to seize them all simultaneously by a *coup de main*, directly we were free to demand their complete surrender under a Treaty of Peace.

On the 1st May, 1919, I handed my charges over to Rear-Admiral Clinton Baker, commanding a division of the Second Battle Squadron ; and later they were taken over by Vice-Admiral Sir Sydney Fremantle, commanding the First Battle Squadron, who I believe intended to act similarly. Although the Germans were forbidden to have wireless, and could not make wireless signals without detection, it was easy enough for them to extemporise wireless reception, and no doubt they did so and listened to Press messages. It will be remembered that there was a delay of a couple of days, after the terms of the Treaty were announced, before the Peace was actually signed. So, knowing their fate, Admiral Reuter seized the opportunity of sinking his ships, while they were still in pawn. Later the remaining German battleships over 10,000 tons were surrendered. I had the task of meeting these German battleships at sea and escorting them into Rosyth, where their crews left them in an indescribably revolting state, and to show their contempt for their officers, they had made filthy use of their cabins.

While I was at Rosyth, Sir Douglas Haig passed through on his way to Aberdeen, to be made an LL.D. of the University ; an honour which was also to be conferred on me, so we went there together. The undergraduates gave us a very warm, though rather a boisterous, welcome. Directly after the ceremony in the University, a number of young soldiers seized Sir Douglas and some sailors—mostly young R.N.V.R. doctors—seized me, and they carried us through the streets to the City Hall, where we were to lunch.

While we were there, a telegram came for Sir Douglas from Marshal Foch, begging him to take part in the Victory March in Paris on the 14th July. The telegram concluded : " But for you and the British Army there would be no Victory March." Our Government had previously asked Sir Douglas to go to

Paris with the British troops, but he had declined ; however, he could not refuse Foch's request, so the programme at Aberdeen was curtailed, in order to enable him to leave that evening.

A few days later the Home Fleet assembled in the Thames, to enable our ships' companies to take part in the Victory March through London on the 19th July. We anchored off Southend, and the ships, which were thrown open to visitors, were crowded. I had got my children's Shetland pony and cart on board, as I was taking it down to our new house near Plymouth, from Aberdour, where it had been turned out since we had left there in 1917. A bluejacket taking a party round the *Lion* was heard to say : " Our ship is so big that the Admiral has a pony and cart to drive round in when he inspects us." In response to an incredulous, " Go on, you're kidding us," he said, " Well, if you don't believe me, come and see it " ; which quite satisfied them as to his veracity !

The night before the march, the ships' companies were encamped in Hyde Park, and were formed up next morning inside Albert Gate in the following order. Sir David Beatty led, with three midshipmen carrying his flag (the union jack of an Admiral of the Fleet) in front of him, followed by his Staff and a group of Admirals who had served in the War ; then came Sir Charles Madden—who was commanding the Home Fleet—preceded by three midshipmen carrying his Admiral's flag, and followed by his Staff. I came next, preceded by three midshipmen carrying my Vice-Admiral's flag, followed by my Staff and the officers and men of the Battle Cruiser Squadron, to which the *Queen Elizabeth's* ship's company had been attached. The crews of the two Battle Squadrons, the Cruiser Squadrons and the Destroyer and Submarine Flotillas, similarly led by their Flag Officers, followed in our wake. Representatives of all the Auxiliary Naval Services, including the W.R.N.S. and the R.N. Nursing Sisters, and the Mercantile Marine, brought up the rear of H.M. Sea Forces. Then came the Army and the Air Force, followed by the other women's organisations.

We waited inside the Albert Gate until the foreign contingents, representing 11 allied nations (marching in alphabetical order to avoid any difficulty about precedence), had marched through Knightsbridge. We could hear the cheering rise and fall, according to their popularity, but the people seem to have

reserved their efforts for their own countrymen, as when we appeared we were met by a roar—something quite indescribable and quite different to anything I had heard in Bruges or Brussels. Sloane Street seemed incredibly narrow, and I felt as if we were in a lane, with a great wall of faces from the pavement to the housetops. We marched through a storm of cheers for seven miles, through Belgravia, across Vauxhall Bridge, up the Kennington Road, over Westminster Bridge, through Whitehall, under Admiralty Arch and down the Mall, to salute His Majesty, who stood on a dais with the Queen and the Royal Family by Queen Victoria's monument—then up Constitution Hill, back into Hyde Park, where the men returned to their camps. Several officers and I waited to see our magnificent Army go past, with their standards and the colours of every regiment in mass formation. It was a wonderful sight.

During the march there were various halts for a few minutes at stated intervals, so that an exact time-table could be kept; and as the papers published programmes, the crowd were able to recognise individuals and they shouted greetings. Our first stop was at the junction of Victoria Street and Vauxhall Bridge Road, and a cheery party of men and women looking out of the windows of the hotel there, held up their glasses and shouted, "Your health, Sir Roger."

I expect other people who took part in that march went through as many different moods as I did. The following incident may help a younger generation to understand. A young naval officer, whose two soldier brothers were lying in Flanders, was marching along, feeling and no doubt looking fearfully sad, when a girl in a friendly East End crowd leant forward, and blowing him a kiss, said, "Smile, sailor, smile," which helped him to regain a happier mood.

While we were at Southend I was asked to come up to dinner at the Carlton Hotel, to help to entertain the Allied Officers, who were the guests of the Government. Mr. Lloyd George made a speech eulogising Marshal Foch and all he had done for the Allied cause. When he got up to reply for the guests, I remarked to a General on the Army Council, now Marshal Foch will be able to tell us, in the presence of the Allies, the nice things that he said to Sir Douglas Haig about the British Army's contribution. However, he refrained.

In 1920 I transferred my flag, first to the *Tiger* and then to the *Hood*. During a few days' leave at Easter, I took my wife to Belgium. We stayed at Ostend, and from there visited Bruges and Zeebrugge, where Commodore Young was hard at work trying to raise the blockships, which were still lying in the canal. Another day we visited the batteries on the coast. We also motored through the Houthoult Forest, a scene of desolation, where every tree had been blasted by shell-fire, and we realised the difficulties the Belgians had to contend with, during their gallant advance in 1918. The battlefields had hardly been cleared up at all, and on one occasion we had to stop for half an hour while a shell was blown up near the road.

Then I took her to Ypres and the battlefields near by, where two of her brothers and two of our brothers-in-law were killed in the early days of the War. Two of the four lie in unknown graves.

In the summer of 1920, I took my squadron, a destroyer leader and eight of the latest destroyers, fitted with mine sweeps, into the Baltic (which was still full of mines). We were sent there to counter some threatened action on the part of the Russian Fleet, but it remained quiet after we arrived, and I was told to visit the capitals of the three Scandinavian Powers. The Kings and the Governments of each country honoured me by lunching on board, and they left us in no doubt as to the estimation in which the British Empire was held at that time.

After I had completed my two years in command of the battle cruisers, I went on half-pay and thoroughly enjoyed a little leisure.

On the 4th July, 1921, the King and Queen of the Belgians paid a state visit to England. I accompanied the Prince of Wales to Dover to meet them, and was attached to the King during his visit; a very pleasant duty, during which we attended many State functions, including a State Dinner and Ball, and they drove in State to the City, where they received a tremendous welcome; but the part that I enjoyed most, were the long walks we took in the Park, when we talked about the War. On one occasion we went to Roehampton to watch a polo match in which Winston Churchill was playing, and it was on this occasion that the King said all the nice things to him about his Antwerp intervention (*see* page 359). The King and Queen

returned to Belgium on the 8th, and I again accompanied the Prince of Wales to see them off from Dover. During his visit the King gave me the Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold, and specially asked that it might be considered as a War decoration.

On 27th July, 1921, the Prince of Wales unveiled the Memorial of the Dover Patrol, which stands on the high cliff to the northward of St. Margaret's Bay. The Mayor's "cairn" had developed into a great granite column. Admiral Bacon attended with all his former Staff, whom he presented to the Prince of Wales. H.R.H. then asked me to present my Staff, but as I was on half-pay, it had not occurred to me to collect them. However, I found four officers with V.C.s and half a dozen with D.S.O.s in the crowd, who had served with me in the Dover Patrol, so I presented them instead.

On 13th August, my wife and I went over to Belgium and stayed with the King and Queen of the Belgians at Laeken. They were alone and we spent a very pleasant three days, with no ceremony of any sort. The Queen showed us her wonderful collection of War photographs, and gave us copies of all those of interest to us. One day the King drove the Queen, my wife and me in his car to Waterloo, and took us over the battlefield, giving us a wonderfully interesting description, some of it from the spot where Napoleon stood during the battle.

When I left Dover we had taken Beechwood House, Sparkwell, on the edge of Dartmoor, about ten miles from Plymouth, the *Lion* and *Hood* being Devonport ships; but we moved into a house in Kent on 6th October, 1921, having been told that there was no prospect of any appointment for me for at least six months. Owing to a motor breakdown, we did not arrive at our new house until 2 a.m. and found a telegram on the hall table, summoning me to the Admiralty at once. I went to London later that day, and was offered the appointment of Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff and a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty, in place of Admiral Sir Osmond Brock, who had to undergo a serious operation. I took up the appointment at once, and held it for nearly four years, during which there were five successive administrations in office, and it was a ceaseless battle to obtain just enough money to maintain a Navy of



sufficient strength, to carry out the duties with which the Board of Admiralty is charged.

Shortly after I had joined, the Civil and Naval Chiefs—Lord Lee and Lord Beatty—went to America with Lord Balfour to take part in the Naval Conference at Washington. I remained behind and represented the Admiralty at the Committee of Imperial Defence, under the chairmanship of Mr. Churchill. We were in close touch from day to day with the proceedings at Washington, and it is no exaggeration to say, that the Washington Treaty could never have been brought into being, without the whole-hearted co-operation of Lord Beatty and the Naval Staff Officers who accompanied him.

In the interests of economy, we had already scrapped six battle cruisers and 11 battleships, before we went to Washington—a fleet in itself more powerful than any other nation had in being at that time. However, the Americans had laid down 16 battleships and battle cruisers in 1916 while they were still neutral; in the meantime we had produced the *Hood*, more powerful than their vessels, and we were also building four super *Hoods*, which would have cost nearly £10,000,000 apiece before they were commissioned. These would have been far more powerful than the new American ships, and indeed than any ships they could build capable of going through the Panama Canal.

It was necessary to stop this new race in battleship construction, and we were called upon to make sacrifices to obtain agreement; nevertheless, I think it was all to the good that the construction of battleships was definitely limited for 15 years; since we were fortunate enough to have had statesmen and sailors in office then, who were determined to safeguard the Empire, by insisting on the right of Great Britain to build and maintain such cruisers and small craft, as we considered necessary, to secure the sea communications of the Empire, on which the very life of Great Britain depends.

I have already related the deplorable effect which the formation of the Royal Air Force had on our operations on the Belgian Coast (*see* page 341 and Appendix IV), and the fact that the Navy was deprived of a number of Handley-Page night bombers, to form an Independent Air Force which, we were told, would have carried out a war of retaliation on the civil population of Germany, had the War lasted.

Whatever the Independent Air Force *might* have done, it greatly limited the power of the Navy to inflict heavy losses on the submarines and torpedo-craft shut up in the Flanders naval bases. Apart from this, the formation of the R.A.F. did not seriously affect the naval situation while the War lasted ; the only change being that a number of Naval officers were forced to take military titles and wear military uniforms.

It is not generally remembered, however, that the Navy possessed a number of dirigibles, kite balloons, 2,800 aircraft—including the most powerful flying-boats in the world—and 55,000 officers and men in the R.N. Air Service, almost all of whom were employed in the defence of our sea communications, and fortunately they remained under direction of the Navy until the War ended.

After the War, the Royal Air Force claimed complete control over everything in the air, very much to the detriment of the development, progress and efficiency of the Naval Air Service, and also the Army's aerial needs.

I was actually told by an Air Marshal, that if we were going to make difficulties, the Air Ministry would maintain its own sea-going aircraft carriers !

In fact the situation became so intolerable, that Lord Beatty demanded a thorough inquiry.

In the autumn of 1922 I accompanied him to a Cabinet Meeting at 10 Downing Street, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Lloyd George), who fully appreciated our point of view, promised that we should have a full and impartial inquiry ; and I have no doubt that if the Coalition Government had remained in office, the Navy would have been freed from the control, which has so greatly hampered the development of its air service.

Every step towards efficiency had to be fought for ; for instance, it was a long time before we established our right to have naval observers ; and an Admiral might be dependent upon some young R.A.F. observer for reports, upon which the whole conduct of the Fleet and the efficiency of his fire control might depend.

In the spring of 1923 an inquiry was held, and the Government, in a spirit of compromise, inflicted a system of dual control upon the Naval Air Service, which is utterly opposed to the fundamental principles of administration and command. Lord

Beatty made it clear, that unless the system was only considered as experimental, and that unless certain alterations were made which we considered vital, the Prime Minister would have to find other naval advisers. These points were at once conceded, but I have always felt, that it would have been in the true interests of the Navy and the country, if we had declined to accept any compromise.

The matter dragged on for several months, as the scheme was really quite unworkable, and it was not until the first Socialist Government took office, and that wise old administrator, Lord Haldane, became responsible for their defence policy, that a fairly workable settlement was arrived at. He himself presided over a committee of three, the other members being Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard and myself; with the result that the so-called Trenchard-Keyes agreement has governed the relations between the Navy and the Air Service ever since. Thanks to the good fellowship of the officers and men of the two Services, it has operated in the Fleet; but it is full of anomalies and it certainly does not make for efficiency.

During these meetings, I had made it perfectly clear, that the Admiralty could only agree to the compromise, provided that every penny spent on the naval air arm should appear in the Naval Estimates, in order that the increase and development of its Air Service should be solely the Admiralty's concern.

Unfortunately, although full of misgivings, we did not foresee the extent to which the Air Ministry, with its many commitments on the Indian Frontier, in Iraq, and Home Defence, would fail to fulfil the Navy's requirements, both in the provision of up-to-date material, and in the training of our naval personnel; and the experiment has been an utter failure.

In November, 1923, while I was at the Admiralty, Lord Curzon was representing Great Britain at an International Conference at Lausanne, which was endeavouring to come to some understanding with Turkey, on several outstanding questions. As a sub-committee was about to be set up, to consider the question of the demilitarisation of the Dardanelles zone, and the freedom of the Straits for merchantmen and men-of-war, Lord Curzon was anxious that a British Naval Officer should preside. The Admiralty sent me to Lausanne in response to his request.

Major-General Sir John Burnett Stuart (the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence) and Lieut.-Colonel Heywood (who had recently been at our G.H.Q. at Constantinople) were representing the War Office ; and the French were represented by my friend Vice-Admiral Lacaze (who had been three years Naval Attaché in Rome with me), and General Weygand—Marshal Foch's right-hand man. Italy and Soviet Russia were also represented on the sub-committee. Turkey's representative was the Prime Minister—Ismet Pasha. The head of the French Mission at Lausanne was Monsieur Barrère, who was the French Ambassador in Italy all the time I was there, and was a hunting friend. Nothing could have been more cordial than our relations with the French, in these trying and difficult negotiations with Turkey.

Ismet Pasha was determined to hold out for the re-fortification of the Dardanelles, and for placing drastic restrictions on the passage of men-of-war through the Straits, unless he could obtain guarantees, which we were not prepared to grant. The French and we were ordered by our respective Governments, to insist on the demilitarisation of the Straits zone, and the freedom of the Straits for the passage of men-of-war.

As neither side was prepared to give in, and Ismet Pasha was pretty certain that we would not go to war about it, we met day after day without getting much further. I presided over all these meetings, but when a purely military question was being discussed, I asked General Weygand to take the chair.

I found Lord Curzon very pleasant and easy to get on with, and one could not but feel proud, at the way in which he absolutely dominated the Conference. He invited me to dine with him two or three times, and we sat talking for hours, mainly about the Dardanelles Campaign, in which he was deeply interested, and declared that he had always backed my point of view. Apropos of Admiral de Robeck's telegram of 9th May, 1915 (*see* Vol. I, page 335) he said, that indirectly it had been one of the principal factors in the formation of the Coalition Government. Then, after ruminating he said : "It is strange what great events arise out of small beginnings ; it brought me into the Cabinet." I heard that, after I had left him and gone to bed, he usually started to work on his papers, much to the discomfort of his young men, who were in great awe of him.

We had one unpleasant incident. At a meeting of the Allied Naval and Military advisers in Lord Curzon's room, at which Sir William Tyrrell—the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office—and Sir Horace Rumbold—Ambassador to Constantinople—were also present; Lord Curzon, who was in a very bad temper, and, I fancy, suffering a good deal of pain, accused Admiral Lacaze of having given away some information to the Turks. The Admiral was naturally very angry, and with great dignity said, that it was the first time in his life that his word had been questioned and his honour impugned. Tyrrell and Rumbold, not wishing to be involved in what was evidently going to be a very unpleasant scene, hastily left the room. I got up to explain to Lord Curzon that he had completely misunderstood Lacaze's action; but Lord Curzon refused to listen to me, and was so offensive, that Lacaze and Weygand left the room and the meeting broke up.

Burnett Stuart and I gave Lord Curzon time to cool down, and then returned, and I told him that we were going up to the French Delegation's hotel to apologise to Lacaze, who was the soul of loyalty, and I asked him if he would like us to take a letter of apology from him. He said that nothing on earth would induce him to apologise. So we left him, and did not speak to him or have anything to do with him for two or three days. After dinner that evening, we went to the French Delegation's hotel, and found that Lacaze had gone to bed, but Weygand took us and a bottle of champagne up to his bedroom, and sitting on his bed, we drank to our eternal friendship, and the incident strengthened, if possible, the bonds of good fellowship which united our two Delegations; and helped to bring about the result that we were working for. Later Lord Curzon, who I am sure felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, wrote Lacaze quite a nice letter of apology.\*

After about three weeks' discussion we arrived at an absolute deadlock with the Turks, and I told Lord Curzon that I was wasting my time, and wished to go back to the Admiralty. We were not prepared to make any further concessions and the Turks had reached a point beyond which they were not

\* This incident is mentioned in "Curzon, the last Phase," by Harold Nicholson, who was not present, and whose highly imaginary account is inaccurate and very unfair to Admiral Lacaze.

prepared to go. It was clear that we were not going to war about it, and the Turks knew it—so I did not feel that I could do any good by staying. Lord Curzon agreed.

I then told Ismet Pasha that I was going. He asked why? I said that I was a busy person at the Admiralty, that we were determined to keep and maintain the Straits open, and as "Sous Chef d'État Major" I would have much to do at the Admiralty, and nothing to do at Lausanne. He laughed and said that we had not finished our discussion. I said that I had already gone as far as was possible, and I had ordered my sleeping berth for that night.

That afternoon at a general meeting presided over by Lord Curzon, which dealt mainly with the Straits Convention, the Turks made several concessions; in fact agreed to nearly everything we demanded, but Turk-like, asked for another committee meeting the following morning. Lord Curzon said that I ought to stay for it. I said that I thought that would be a great mistake. I had told Ismet Pasha that I was going, and had given him the reason. If I stayed, he would think we were weakening, and I proposed to say good-bye to him there and then. Lord Curzon laughed and said: "All right, weep on the neck of your beloved Ismet, and go."

Ismet simply would not believe that I was really going, but said he hoped that if ever I went to the Mediterranean I would pay him a visit. I said if ever I was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean, I would certainly come up through the Straits to Constantinople and visit him at Angora; and we parted the best of friends.

I heard afterwards that he went that night to see Admiral Lacaze, who was to preside over the sub-committee after my departure, and said, "But Keyes is not going." Lacaze replied that I was. Ismet said, "But he will come back." Lacaze said, "No, he will never come back." Ismet retorted, "Oh yes he will, General 'X' always came back." Lacaze replied, "I know Keyes, and I am sure that he will never come back."

The next morning at the Straits Convention sub-committee, presided over in my absence by Lacaze, the Turks agreed to all our terms, which were eventually embodied in a Treaty; and so I like to think that after all, I contributed something to the forcing of the Dardanelles.

Early in 1925, I was offered command of the Mediterranean Station—to my mind the best appointment in the Navy. Before leaving, my wife and I took part in a ceremony which put a final seal on my War experiences. Thanks to the Anglo-Belgian Union, a memorial was erected at the shore end of Zeebrugge Mole, in the form of a figure of St. George and the Dragon, on the top of a high column. It had been subscribed for by Belgian, British and French people, to commemorate our attack on St. George's Day, 1918.

On St. George's Day, 1925, the King and Queen of the Belgians came from Brussels to unveil the Memorial. The Admiralty gave special facilities for any officer or man, who took part in the raid, to join a cruiser at Dover, which carried them to Zeebrugge. A great number took advantage of this, and they received a wonderful reception from the friendly Belgians of the neighbourhood, who assembled in great crowds to do honour to the men, who in striving to carry on the great traditions they inherited, had—their King assured us—given fresh hope to Belgium, in one of the darkest hours of the War.

# APPENDIX I

## GUNS ON BELGIAN COAST

<i>Number.</i>	<i>Calibre.</i>	<i>Battery.</i>
1 . .	15-in. Guns .	Leugenboom
4 . .	15-in. „ .	Deutschland (Jacobynessen)
4 . .	12-in. „ .	Kaiser Wilhelm II (Knocke)
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Het Zoute
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Donkerklock
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Turkijen
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Hindenburg
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Tirpitz
4 . .	11-in. „ .	Dehan
4 . .	11-in. Howitzers	Grossen
2 . .	11-in. „	No. 18
2 . .	11-in. „	No. 11
1 . .	11-in. „	No. 7
4 . .	8-in. Guns .	Augusta
4 . .	8-in. „ .	Goeben
4 . .	8-in. „ .	Hertha
1 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 12
1 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 12A
1 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 11A
2 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 8
2 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 5A
4 . .	8-in. „ .	No. 3
74 . .	6-in. „	
10 . .	4.7-in. „	
53 . .	4-in. „	
26 . .	3.5-in. „	

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229 Guns.

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## APPENDIX II

REPORT ON "Z. O." OPERATION FORWARDED TO ADMIRALTY AND  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GRAND FLEET, 3 P.M., 23RD APRIL, 1918

RESULT of operation Ostend as follows :

*Brilliant* and *Sirius* are not inside Ostend Harbour, but probably are ashore just to the eastward of entrance. Officers and crews of both ships taken off successfully and no casualties. There was unfortunate shift of wind at critical moment and ends of pier and entrance were obscured by smoke from Ostend, and light buoys put down by small craft to mark the entrance were destroyed by gunfire. All C.M.B.s and M.L.s have returned intact, very few casualties.

No casualties or damage to either destroyers or monitors of Ostend force, though they were met by very heavy fire. Monitors fired about 360 rounds aggregate.

Further particulars of operation at Zeebrugge as follows :

*Vindictive*, *Iris* and *Daffodil* remained alongside the Mole at Zeebrugge for over an hour, and inflicted loss on the personnel of destroyers alongside the Mole, and a good deal of material damage was done with howitzers and Stokes mortars. This raiding force suffered rather severe casualties, mainly while going alongside, from the small guns on the extension, which were not entirely covered by smoke. When the attack commenced, the wind was from north-east, which enabled a most effective smoke-screen to be laid. Enemy fired heavily throughout the operation without much success, until about 00.50 a.m., when the wind unfortunately shifted to the south-west, which uncovered vessels to the searchlights and star-shells, and exposed them to a heavy fire at short range.

*Thetis* led the blockships and came into very heavy fire from batteries on both sides of the canal, also from T.B.D.s alongside the Mole which severely damaged her. She fouled the net protection and blew her charges when in a sinking condition, between 200 and 300 yards north by east magnetic of the Eastern

Arm. The crew were picked up by *ML*526 and saved, with the exception of five killed or missing and three wounded.

*Intrepid* followed *Thetis* and entering the canal sank herself at an angle of about 45° to the channel, her stern being close to the western bank and bow 10 to 20 yards from opposite bank. Owing to the failure of an M.L. to take off the surplus stokers as arranged, two and a half hours before arrival, *Intrepid* had four officers and 86 men on board, instead of four officers and 55 men, and of these one is reported killed and five wounded.

*Iphigenia*, following *Intrepid*, rammed a dredger off the Western Arm and sank herself across the channel at an angle of about 45° abreast the base of the arms of the canal. It is possible that there is a narrow channel along the eastern side of the canal at high water.

*Iphigenia* had one officer very seriously wounded, two slightly wounded, three men killed and 16 wounded.

The majority of the crews of *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* were taken off by *ML*282, which proceeded into the canal and alongside *Iphigenia* in a most gallant manner.

*Motor Launches*. Thirty-three M.L.s took part, of which seven were employed removing surplus crews before reaching objective. Of the 26 engaged in making smoke and picking up crews of blockships after they were sunk, two are known to have been sunk, the majority of the crews being saved.

*Coastal Motor Boats*. Sixteen C.M.B.s were engaged, all of which have returned with slight casualties to personnel.

*Destroyers*. Twelve destroyers and Flotilla Leaders were employed, and of those engaged inshore covering M.L.s and C.M.B.s, *North Star* was sunk. About 25 of her crew are missing. *Phoebe* slightly damaged and suffered some casualties. *North Star* fired five torpedoes at vessels alongside the Mole, and her Captain believes that vessels were hit. A C.M.B. claims to have torpedoed a destroyer alongside the Mole.

Throughout the operation the enemy torpedo-craft made no attempt to attack the numerous motor boats and few destroyers, which remained within a few hundred yards of the Mole and permanent defences and batteries for nearly two hours.

Submarine *C*<sub>3</sub> was blown up in viaduct of Mole, and subsequent aerial reconnaissance reports a gap of 15 to 20 yards.

Very much regret that Colonel Elliot, R.M., and Acting-Captain H. C. Halahan, R.N., who commanded the Marine and Bluejacket assaulting forces respectively, were both killed. Regret also that Wing-Commander Brock, who was responsible for the production of smoke, without which the operation could not have been successful, is missing and believed to have been killed on the Mole.

ROGER KEYES,  
Vice-Admiral Dover Patrol.

### APPENDIX III

#### EXTRACT FROM THE VICTORIA CROSS WARRANT

SEVENTHLY.—It is ordained that the decoration may be conferred on the spot where the act to be rewarded by the grant of such decoration has been performed under the following circumstances :

I. When the fleet or army, in which such act has been performed, is under the eye and command of an admiral or general officer commanding the forces.

II. Where the naval or military force is under the eye and command of an admiral or commodore commanding a squadron or detached naval force, or of a general commanding a corps, or division or brigade on a distinct and detached service, when such admiral, commodore, or general officer shall have the power of conferring the decoration on the spot, subject to confirmation by us.

THIRTEENTHLY.—It is ordained that, in the event of a gallant and daring act having been performed by a squadron, ship's company, a detached body of seamen and marines, not under 50 in number, or by a brigade, regiment, troop, or company, in which the admiral, general, or other officer commanding such forces, may deem that all are equally brave and distinguished, and that no special selection can be made by them, then in such case the admiral, general, or other officer commanding may direct that for any such body of seamen and marines, or for every troop or company of soldiers, one officer shall be selected by the officers engaged for the decoration ; and in like manner one petty officer or non-commissioned officer engaged ; and two seamen or privates or marines shall be selected by the seamen, private soldiers, or marines engaged respectively for the decoration ; and the names of those selected shall be transmitted by the senior officer in command of the naval force, brigade, regiment, troop, or company, to the admiral or general officer commanding, who shall in due manner confer the decoration as if the acts were done under his own eye.

## APPENDIX IV

### EXTRACTS OF LETTER TO THE ADMIRALTY ON CHANGE OF R.N.A.S. TO R.A.F.

28th May, 1918.

At the beginning of 1918, the R.N.A.S. Units at Dunkirk consisted of a well-organised, self-contained force, with adequate arrangements as regards repair and maintenance of machines, supplies of petrol, stores and bombs. In addition constructional parties and telephone company. This organisation, which grew up with the approval and assistance of the Admiralty, was found to be necessary for an Aerial Force operating for a Naval Command and outside the area of the British Army in the Field.

The proposals forwarded by my predecessor and approved by their Lordships, made provision for a considerable increase in the Force, viz., eight Fighting Squadrons, one Reconnaissance Squadron, two Light Bombing Squadrons, four Heavy Bombing Squadrons, and one Training Squadron.

Since the formation of the Royal Air Force, however, the organisation at Dunkirk has been entirely disintegrated. Although the conditions under which they work are entirely different to those on the Front, the Force has been standardised entirely on the old R.F.C. standardisation. Not only have the fighting squadrons been reduced to two in number, but bombing squadrons have been entirely withdrawn, and although one Handley-Page squadron is still in the area, it is working under the General Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force. Although nominally employed on work in connection with the Navy, I am unable to take that personal interest in the welfare of the squadron, which I should have liked, and I am precluded from forwarding any recommendation for honours for work, which is carried out solely in connection with naval operations.

I am informed that a squadron of F.E.2.B. machines is being attached to the 5th Group for operations in connection with the Navy, and although perhaps suitable for night bombing on short objectives, it cannot be considered suitable for bombing

such objectives as Bruges, where the Anti-aircraft Defences are of great strength. Further, I would point out, that six of these machines only carry the same weight of bombs as one Handley-Page machine.

I am further informed by Brigadier-General Lambe, that he has received instructions from the Air Ministry, that the Rolls-Royce machines now belonging to the Reconnaissance Squadron will be replaced by D.H.9 machines, which are not only inferior in every respect, but in which it is not possible to fit the special cameras, which are necessary on this coast. The reason given is that this is necessary, in order to equip three squadrons of H.D.4 Rolls-Royce machines for work with the Expeditionary Force.

The Naval Aircraft Stores Depot was ordered to be closed down, and consequently there is no source of supply by which stores can be obtained, except by appealing to the R.A.F. in the Field, which method has proved most unsatisfactory. At present many engines have been held up due to want of spares, and there is a great shortage of Bessonneau Hangars and Nestler Hangars, although a sufficient stock was maintained previously, but these were all ordered to be transferred to the R.A.F. in the Field. A recent application for Bessonneaux to R.A.F. in the Field was replied to in the sense that these should be obtained from England.

It was conclusively proved last year that the establishment of a training squadron not only resulted in vastly increased efficiency in the pilots, but reduced the casualties to personnel by over 40 per cent., and a corresponding saving in machines resulted. This squadron was ordered to be abolished on the formation of the Royal Air Force, and consequently the casualties are now rapidly on the increase.

Whilst fully appreciating the great value of aerial warfare in co-operation with the Armies in the Field, I desire to impress upon their Lordships that the formation of the Royal Air Force has, up to the present, resulted in a most detrimental manner, as regards co-operation with the Naval Forces under my command. The correspondence alluded to, shows that but little consideration is being given to the work of the Navy on the Belgian Coast ; and displays a complete failure to appreciate our requirements. Although the port of Bruges has been closed to traffic

since the 23rd April, and a very large number of T.B.D.s, T.B.s and submarines have been locked up either in the harbour of Bruges or in the Canal, yet owing to having only a few Handley-Page machines, and practically no day-bombing machines until quite recently, the full fruits resulting from these operations have certainly not been gathered, owing to the inadequacy of the bombing force at my disposal.

I am very strongly of the opinion that the present situation is thoroughly unsatisfactory, and becoming more so from day to day. I submit that their Lordships may be moved to take the strongest possible action without delay, and insist on the Royal Air Force Units of the 3th Group being maintained at the required strength, without further interference from the General Officer Commanding the R.A.F. in the Field, who does not seem to understand the elements of the Naval requirements on the Belgian Coast, or the great importance of its bearing on the general conduct of the War.

The fine force which was built up by the Admiralty for services on the Belgian Coast, has been thoroughly disorganised, and the value of the few remaining units is rapidly decreasing in consequence.

ROGER KEYES,  
Vice-Admiral, Dover Patrol.

